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Mona Lisa (Leonardo da Vinci, Paris).

Photo by Mansell.

The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci

By Dmitri Merejkowski

Author of "The Death of the Gods."

Authorised Translation from the Russian

By Herbert Trench

In Two Volumes

Volume II

With 66 Illustrations

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CONTENTS

PAGE

BOOK IX (*Continued*)

THE SIMILITUDES—1498–1499 3

BOOK X

CALM WATERS—1499–1500 46

BOOK XI

THERE SHALL BE WINGS—1500 . . . 110

BOOK XII

"AUT CÆSAR AUT NIHIL"—1500–1503 . . 141

BOOK XIII

THE PURPLE BEAST—1503 206

BOOK XIV

MONNA LISA GIOCONDA—1503–1506 . . . 245

BOOK XV

THE HOLY INQUISITION—1506–1513 . . . 287

BOOK XVI

LEONARDO, MICHELANGELO, AND RAPHAEL—1513–1515 309

BOOK XVII

DEATH—THE WINGED PRECURSOR—1516–1519 . 328

EPILOGUE 362

T2421

ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

Mona Lisa (Leonardo da Vinci, Paris) *Frontispiece*
Photo by Mansell.

Scythed Chariot (Leonardo da Vinci, London) 20
Photo by Anderson.

The Death of Savonarola (Florence) . 42
Photo by Alinari.

The Emperor Maximilian (Rubens, Vienna) 52
Photo by Hanfstaengl.

Cæsar Borgia (Giorgione) . . . 72
Photo by Alinari.

The Madonna of the Rocks (Leonardo da Vinci, National Gallery) . . . 102
Photo by Mansell.

The Baptism of Christ (Verrocchio, Florence) 130
Photo by Anderson.

Adoration of the Magi (Leonardo da Vinci, Florence) 132
Photo by Brogi.

PAGE

ICARUS (GIOTTO, FLORENCE) 138
Photo by Alinari.

THE CASTLE OF ST. ANGELO (ROME) . . 142
Photo by Anderson.

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI 152
Photo by Brogi.

ALFONSO D'ESTE (DOSSI, MODENA) . . . 178
Photo by Alinari.

MADONNA IN THE BADIA (LIPPO LIPPI, FLORENCE) 194
Photo by Anderson.

THE FALL OF ANTICHRIST (LUCA, SIGNORELLI) 208
Photo by Alinari.

THE VISITATION OF THE VIRGIN (PINTURICCHIO, ROME) 216
Photo by Anderson.

POPE ALEXANDER THE SIXTH (DETTAGLIO, ROME) 218
Photo by Anderson.

ST. GIROLAMO (LEONARDO DA VINCI, ROME) . 228
Photo by Anderson.

ST. ANNE AND THE VIRGIN (LEONARDO DA VINCI, PARIS) 236
Photo by Mansell.

PAGE

Pietro Soderini (Florence) . . . 238
Photo by Alinari.

Arch of Titus (Rome) 242
Photo by Anderson.

David (Michelangelo, Florence) . . 256
Photo by Anderson.

Frescoes by Masaccio in the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence . 262
Photo by Anderson.

The Hill of San Miniato, Florence . . 264
Photo by Alinari.

Michelangelo (by himself, Florence) . 278
Photo by Alinari.

Pope Julius II. (Raphael, Florence) . . 296
Photo by Anderson.

Giovanni Boltraffio. (Francesco Melzi, Milan) 306
Photo by Anderson.

Frescoes by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, Rome 316
Photo by Anderson.

Raphael (by himself, Florence) . . 320
Photo by Alinari.

Francis I. of France (Milan) . . . 324
Photo by Anderson.

PAGE

BACCHUS (LEONARDO DA VINCI, PARIS) . . 336
Photo by Alinari.

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST (LEONARDO DA VINCI, GENOA) 338
Photo by Brogi.

MARGUERITE DE VALOIS (AFTER CORNEILLE DE LYON) 344
Photo by Giraudon.

LEONARDO DA VINCI (BY HIMSELF, TURIN) . 358
Photo by Anderson.

LEONARDO DA VINCI

Book IX (*Continued*)

BOOK IX (*Continued*)

THE SIMILITUDES—1498–1499

IX

NEXT morning Leonardo, with Astro carrying sketch-books, paint-boxes, and brushes, was on his way to the monastery for a day's work on the figure of the Saviour. He stopped in the court-yard to speak to Nastasio, who was busily grooming a grey mare.

"Bravo!" said the Master, "and how is Giannino to-day?" Giannino was his favourite horse.

"Giannino is all right," answered the groom, "but the piebald is lame."

"The piebald?" said Leonardo, vexed; "and since when?"

"Since four days agone," replied Nastasio, surlily; and without looking at his master, he continued currycombing the mare's hindquarters with such energy that she changed her feet.

Leonardo, however, wished to see the piebald, and the groom took him to the stable. When Giovanni Boltraffio, a few minutes later, came to the court-yard fountain for his morning wash,

he heard the Master talking in loud piercing tones almost feminine in their shrillness, which he used in rare passions of sudden, violent, but not dangerous anger.

"Tell me this instant, you fool, you drunken ape, tell me who bade you summon the horse-leech?"

"I pray you, Messere, could a sick horse be left without a leech?"

"A pretty leech! Think you, fool, that stinking plaster——"

" 'T is not so much a plaster as a charm. You are not learned in these matters, and that is why you are so wroth."

"The devil take you and your charms together! How could that ignoramus cure anything when he knows naught of the structure of the body and has never heard the name of anatomy?"

"Anatomy, forsooth!" said Nastasio, raising lazy contemptuous eyes to his Master.

"Ass!" shouted the latter; "take yourself off out of my service!"

The groom did not move an eyelash.

"I was on the stroke of leaving you on my own account. Your Excellency owes me three months' wages; and as regards the oats, 't is no fault of mine. Marco gives me no money for oats."

"What 's the meaning of all this? Once I issue my orders——"

Nastasio shrugged his shoulders and returned to his grooming of the grey mare, working vio-

lently as if venting his spleen on the dumb animal.

Meantime Giovanni, amused by the altercation, was smiling as he scrubbed his face with a coarse towel.

"Shall we set out, Master?" asked Astro, wearied by the delay.

"Wait," replied Leonardo; "I must ask Marco about the oats. I would know how much truth is in the words of this scoundrel."

And he returned to the house, Giovanni following him. Marco was in the studio, working as usual by rule and with mathematical accuracy, perspiring and panting as if he were rolling a weight uphill. His closely compressed lips, the disorder of his red hair, his red fat ineffectual fingers, seemed to say, "Patience and perseverance will conquer all things."

"Marco! Is it true you give out no money for the horses' oats?"

"Of a surety it is true."

"How is that, friend?" exclaimed the painter, his look having already become timorous before the stern face of him who was steward of the household. "I bade you, Marco, take heed to remember the oats. Have you forgotten?"

"No, I have not forgotten; but there is no money."

"I guessed as much. There is always this lack of money. None the less, Marco, I ask you, can horses live without oats?"

Marco threw his brush away angrily. And Giovanni noticed how the master and the scholar seemed to have changed places.

"Hearken, Master!" said Marco. "You bade me take charge of the housekeeping, and not trouble you. Why do you yourself re-open the matter?"

"Marco!" said Leonardo, with gentle reproach, "'t was but a week ago that I gave you thirty florins."

"Thirty florins! Pr'ythee count it up. Of this thirty, four were a loan to Pacioli, two to that eternal sponge, Messer Galeotto Sacrobosco; five went to the body-snatchers for your anatomy studies; three for mending the glass and the stoves in the hot room for your reptiles and fishes; and six golden ducats went for that spotted devil——"

"Do you mean the camelopard?"

"Precisely; the camelopard. We have nothing to eat ourselves, but we feed that cursed beast. And whether we feed him or not, 't is clear that he will die."

"Never mind, Marco," said Leonardo, gently; "if he die I will dissect him. The neck vertebræ of these animals are very curious."

"The neck vertebræ! Oh, Master! Master! if you had not all these fancies for horses, and corpses, and giraffes, and fish, and every sort of beast, we might live as lords, asking alms of no one. Is not daily bread better than caprices?"

"Bread? Have I ever asked for anything better than bread? Oh, I know very well, Marco, you would like to see the death of all my creatures, though they cost me so much trouble and expense to obtain. They are indispensable to me—more so than you can imagine. You want to have everything your own way."

Helpless injury trembled in the voice of the Master; and Marco maintained a sulky silence.

"But what is to become of us?" continued Leonardo. "Already a famine of oats? We were never in such straits before."

"We have always been in straits," said Marco, "and we always shall be. What can you expect? For a year we have not had a *quattrino* from the Duke. Messer Ambrogio Ferrari says daily, 'To-morrow! to-morrow!' and to my thinking he but mocks us."

"Mocks us! Well, I will show him how to mock at me! I will complain to the Duke! I will give that scurvy piece, Ambrogio, a lesson he shall not forget! the Lord send him an evil Easter!"

Marco made a vague gesture, as if to say it was not Leonardo who would teach lessons to the Duke's treasurer. Then an expression of kindness and love came over his hard features, and he added soothingly:

"No, no, Master, let it be! God is merciful, and we shall get along in some fashion. If you really take it to heart, I will find the money even for your oats."

And Marco reflected that he could use some of his own money, a little hoard he had been making for his mother.

"The oats are not the major question," said Leonardo, sinking wearily on a chair, and defending his eyes as if from a cruel wind. "Hearken, friend, there is a thing I have not yet told you; next month I shall absolutely require eighty ducats, which I have had on loan. There is no need to stare at me with those eyes, Marco."

"Of whom had you the loan?"

"Of the money-changer, Arnoldo——"

"Of Arnoldo! Oh, Master! what have you done? Don't you know he is worse than any infidel or any Jew? Why did you not tell me at once?"

Leonardo hung his head.

"I wanted the money — be not so wroth, Marco!" he said; and added piteously, "Bring the reckonings, perhaps we shall be able to devise something."

Marco was convinced they could devise nothing; however, finding absolute obedience the best way of influencing the Master, he fetched the account-books. Leonardo's brow contracted in a look of disgust, and he watched the opening of the too familiar green volume with the air of one looking into a gaping wound; then together they plunged into calculations, and it was wonder and pity to see the great mathematician making the blunders of a child in the additions and the subtractions.

Now and then he suddenly remembered some mislaid account of a thousand ducats, sought it, fumbled in cases and boxes, and dusty piles of papers, but found in its place trifling and useless memoranda written in his own hand, such, for instance, as that one of Salaino's cloak:

Silver brocade . .	Livre	15	soldi	4
Crimson velvet for trimming,	"	9	"	0
Braid . . .	"	0	"	9
Buttons . . .	"	0	"	12

He tore them angrily, and blushing and swearing threw them under the table.

Giovanni, seeing on the great man's face these marks of human weakness, murmured to himself:

"A new Hermes Trismegistus halved with a new Prometheus? Nay, neither god nor Titan, but a simple mortal like the rest of us! And to think that I feared him! the poor kind soul!"

X

Two days passed, and as Marco had foreseen, Leonardo forgot the money question completely. He demanded three florins for the purchase of a fossil with so confident an air that Marco lacked courage to refuse him, and handed out the money from his private hoard. The ducal treasurer, deaf to Leonardo's entreaties, had still not paid the year's salary, and was the less likely to do so that Ludovico himself required great

sums to spend in preparation for war with France. Leonardo was obliged to borrow wherever he could, even from his own pupils.

Nor was the money forthcoming for the completion of the Sforza monument. The plaster cast, the mould, the receiver for the molten metal, the furnace — all were ready; but when the artist presented his estimate for the bronze, Il Moro was alarmed, and even refused him an interview.

At last, in the end of November, urged by want he wrote a letter to the Duke; sentences fragmentary, disconnected, like the stammering of one overcome by confusion, who does not know how to beg:

"Signore, knowing that the mind of Your Excellency is occupied with affairs of greater moment, yet fearing that silence may be a cause of anger to my most gracious patron, I take freedom to remind Your Excellency of my humble necessities, and of the needs of my art, now condemned to inactivity. . . . Two years have passed since I have received my salary. . . .

"Some persons in Your Grace's service can afford to wait, since they have other revenue, but I with my art, which, however, I would gladly abandon for one more lucrative. . . .

"My life is at Your Excellency's service; and I shall always be prompt in obedience.

"I speak not of the monument, for I know that the times. . . .

"It irks me that owing to the necessity of earning my livelihood I must break off my work, and occupy myself with trivialities.

"I have had to provide for six persons during fifty-six months, with only fifty ducats. . . .

"I know not to what I must dedicate my activity. . . .

"Am I to study glory, or only my daily bread . . . ?"

XI

One November evening, after a day spent in soliciting the munificent Gaspare Visconti, and Arnoldo the usurer, and in coming to terms with the hangman—who demanded payment for two corpses (used by the artist for studies), threatening in default to denounce the purchaser to the Holy Inquisition—Leonardo came home greatly wearied and out of heart. Having dried his clothes by the kitchen fire, and received the key of his workshop from Astro, he was proceeding thither when he was surprised by the sound of voices behind the door.

"What?" he said, "is it not locked? Can it be thieves?"

Recognising the tones of his pupils, Giovanni and Cesare, he suspected them of prying into his private papers. About to throw open the door, he was arrested by a vivid imagination of their confusion, and the wide eyes of terror with which

they would greet him. He felt ashamed for them, and went away, walking on tiptoe as if himself the culprit; presently he called from the studio:

"Astro! Astro! Bring me a light! Where have you all got to? Andrea! Marco! Giovanni! Cesare!"

The voices in his room were silenced, some glass thing fell with a crash, there was a shutting of windows. Leonardo still hesitated, unable to resolve upon entry. In his heart was not so much anger as disgust.

His suspicions were not amiss. Having entered by the court-yard window, Giovanni and Cesare had searched his drawers and opened his papers, drawings, and diaries. Boltraffio, very pale, held a mirror, and Cesare read the master's inverted writing:

"*Laude del Sole. I cannot but blame Epicurus, who maintained that the sun's magnitude is no other than it seemeth. Socrates astounds me, who, depreciating so great a light, calls it but a molten stone. And would I had vocables strong enough to confound those who prefer the apotheosis of man to the apotheosis of the sun!*"

"Shall we pass on?" asked Cesare.

"Read to the end," said Giovanni.

"*Those who worship men for gods,*" continued the reader, "*are greatly in error; for man, though he were of the magnitude of the earth would appear smaller than the smallest star, a scarce visible spot*

upon the universe; and seeing, further, that men in their sepulture are subject to putridity and decay——"

"Strange," observed Cesare, "that he can reverence the sun, but appears not to recognise Him who, dying, was the vanquisher of death."

He turned the page. "Let us try this."

"In all parts of Europe, by great peoples, will be bewailed this day the death of a man who died in Asia——"

"You don't understand, Giovanni. I will explain: he treats of Good Friday. Shall I go on?"

"O mathematicians, throw light upon this error! Spirit exists not without body, and where is no flesh, nor blood, nerves, tongue, bone, and muscle can be neither voice nor movement."

"I can't make it out; the next lines are erased. We will pass to the end."

"Other definitions of spirit I leave to the Holy Fathers, who know the secrets of Nature by revelation from above."

"H'm, I would not be Messer Leonardo if these lucubrations should fall into the hands of the Holy Fathers! Here we have another of his prophecies."

"Enough shall there be, who, leaving the ascesis of labour and poverty, think to serve God by living luxuriously in buildings like palaces, and in amassing visible wealth at the expense of the wealth invisible."

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"I conclude he here treats of Indulgences. Quite in Savonarola's vein! A stone slung at the Pope."

"*Those who have been dead a thousand years will be the food of the living.*"

"That passes me! Nay, though, the thousand-year dead must be the saints in whose name the monks collect money. A pretty riddle!"

"*They shall adore those who do not hear; they shall burn lamps before those who do not see.*"

"Images of saints."

"*Women shall disclose to men their passions, their secret and shameful deeds.*"

"The confessional! How does it like you, Giovanni? A strange man, is he not? But there is no real malice in these riddles. It is only jest—sporting with blasphemy."

"*Many who cozen the simple by dealing in pretended miracles, punish those who unmask their deceits.*"

"The trial by fire, of which the reckless Savonarola was the victim."

He laid down the book and looked at his companion.

"Well, is it enough? or do you want further proof?"

Boltraffio shook his head: "No, Cesare, it is not enough. Could we but find a place where he speaks *plainly!*"

"Plainly? Ask not for that. Such is his disposition. He deals ever double, conceals him-

self, feigns like a woman. Riddles are his nature. Nor does he know himself. He is his own greatest enigma."

"Cesare is right," thought Giovanni. "Better open blasphemy than these mockings—this smile as of the unbelieving Thomas, who thrust his fingers into the wounds of the Lord."

Then Cesare showed a drawing in red chalk, tossed carelessly among the machines and the tables of calculations—the Virgin with the Child in the desert; seated on a stone, she was drawing triangles and circles with her finger on the sand—the Mother of God teaching the Divine Son geometry, the principle of all knowledge.

Giovanni gazed long at this strange drawing; then he held it to the mirror that they might decipher the inscription. Cesare had scarce read the first words, "*Necessity, the eternal teacher,*" when Leonardo's call was heard:

"Astro! Bring me a light! Andrea! Marco! Giovanni! Cesare!" Then Giovanni turned pale. The mirror fell from his hands, breaking into pieces.

"An evil omen," said Cesare, with a smile.

Like thieves caught in the act they pushed the papers into their places, picked up the fragments of the mirror, opened the window, sprang to the ledge and, clinging to the water-pipe and the branches of the vine, dropped into the court. Cesare missed his hold, fell, and sprained his foot.

XII

That evening Leonardo did not find his accustomed solace in his mathematics. He walked the room, seated himself, began a drawing, flung it aside. His mind was vaguely uneasy; there was something he must decide, yet could not. His thought reverted continually to the same thing; how Boltraffio had fled to Savonarola, had returned, and for a time had settled down to work, recovering his calm in the pursuit of art; but ever since that disastrous trial by fire, and especially since the news of the prophet's approaching execution had reached Milan, he had again been racked by doubts and regret. Leonardo understood how he suffered; how again he felt the necessity to go away, yet could not make up his mind to leave; how terrible was the struggle in a nature too deep not to feel, too weak to overcome its own contradictions. Sometimes Leonardo fancied he must himself drive his disciple away in order to save him.

A bitter smile came to his lips as he thought:

"It is true that I—I only—have ruined him! 'T is a just accusation that I have the evil eye! How am I to help him?"

He rose and mounted the steep dark stair, knocked at a door, and receiving no answer opened it and went in. In the narrow room the darkness was scarce broken by the little lamp burning before the figure of the Madonna; rain

was splashing on the roof, and the autumn wind howled mournfully. A black crucifix was suspended against the white wall. Giovanni, still dressed, his face hidden in the pillow, lay in the unrestful position of a suffering child.

"Are you asleep?" asked the Master, bending over him.

He started up, with a faint cry, gazing with the same terror-struck eyes and defensive hands that Leonardo had seen with the little Maia.

"Why, Giovanni! Giovanni! What is the matter? It is only I!"

Boltraffio came to himself, passing his hand slowly over his eyes.

"Ah! it is you, Messer Leonardo! I fancied—I have had a terrible dream! But is it really *you?*" he repeated, his brows contracted as if he could hardly believe his eyes.

The Master sat on the bedside and touched the lad's forehead.

"You have fever. Why did you not tell me?"

Giovanni would have turned away, but looking afresh at Leonardo, and joining his hands supplicatingly, he said:

"Drive me out! Drive me from you, Master! I shall never myself have the courage to go. I am guilty towards you—a vile traitor."

For answer Leonardo embraced him, drawing him to his breast.

"What say you, my son? Do you think I have not seen your distress? If there is anything

in which you think you have wronged me, I pardon it. Perhaps some day you will be asked to pardon me!"

Astonished, Giovanni gazed at him with dreaming eyes, then suddenly hid his face in his breast, sobs shaking his frame as he murmured:

"If ever again I am obliged to leave you, oh, Master, do not think it is for lack of love! I myself know not what has happened to me. Sometimes I fear I am losing my reason. God has forsaken me! Oh, never, never suppose—for truly I love you more than all else in the world! I love you more than Fra Benedetto, who is as my father. Never will any one love you as do I!"

Leonardo soothed him like a child. "Enough! Enough! Think you I credit not your love, my poor lad? Has Cesare suggested—but why do you heed Cesare? He is clever, and he, too, loves me well, for all he thinks to hate me; but there are matters beyond him."

The disciple had become calm, and his tears were dry. Raising himself, and fixing scrutinising eyes on the Master, he shook his head.

"No; it was not Cesare. 'T was I myself. And yet no; it was not I, but *he*."

"Who is *he?*"

Giovanni again trembled, and pressed closer to his friend. "No, no! For God's sake let us not speak of *him!*"

"Listen, my son," answered Leonardo, in that soothing yet severe and almost rough tone

in which a doctor speaks to a sick child: "I see you have a weight upon your heart. You must tell me all; all, do you hear? Thus only shall I be able to help you"; and after a pause he added: "Tell me of whom you spoke just now."

Giovanni looked round as if in fear; then whispered in low, awestruck tones:

"Of your Semblance."

"My Semblance? How mean you? Did you see it in a dream?"

"No; in reality."

For a moment Leonardo thought him delirious.

"Messer Leonardo, three nights ago you, yourself, came to me as you have come to-night?"

"No, I did not come. Why do you ask? Can you not remember yourself?"

"I do remember. Master, now I am certain it was *he!*"

"But what has given you this idea? What happened?" He felt that Giovanni wished to speak, and sought to force him to do so, in the hope it would afford him relief.

"This is what happened. Three nights ago he came to me as you have come to-day at this very hour, and he sat on the edge of the bed as you do now, and in every word, in every motion he was as you; and his face was like yours, only as if seen in a glass, nor was he, like you, left-handed, so I thought at once within myself, perchance it was not you; and he knew my thought, yet dissembled and made no sign, but pretended

that we both knew naught. Only on leaving he turned himself round to me and said: 'Hast thou never, Giovanni, seen that one in my likeness? If so be thou dost see him, be not at all afraid.' And from his saying this I understood all."

"And you still believe this, my poor boy?"

"How should I not believe it, when I saw him as now I see you? Ay, and he spoke with me!"

"Of what did he speak?"

Giovanni covered his face with his hands, and did not answer at once.

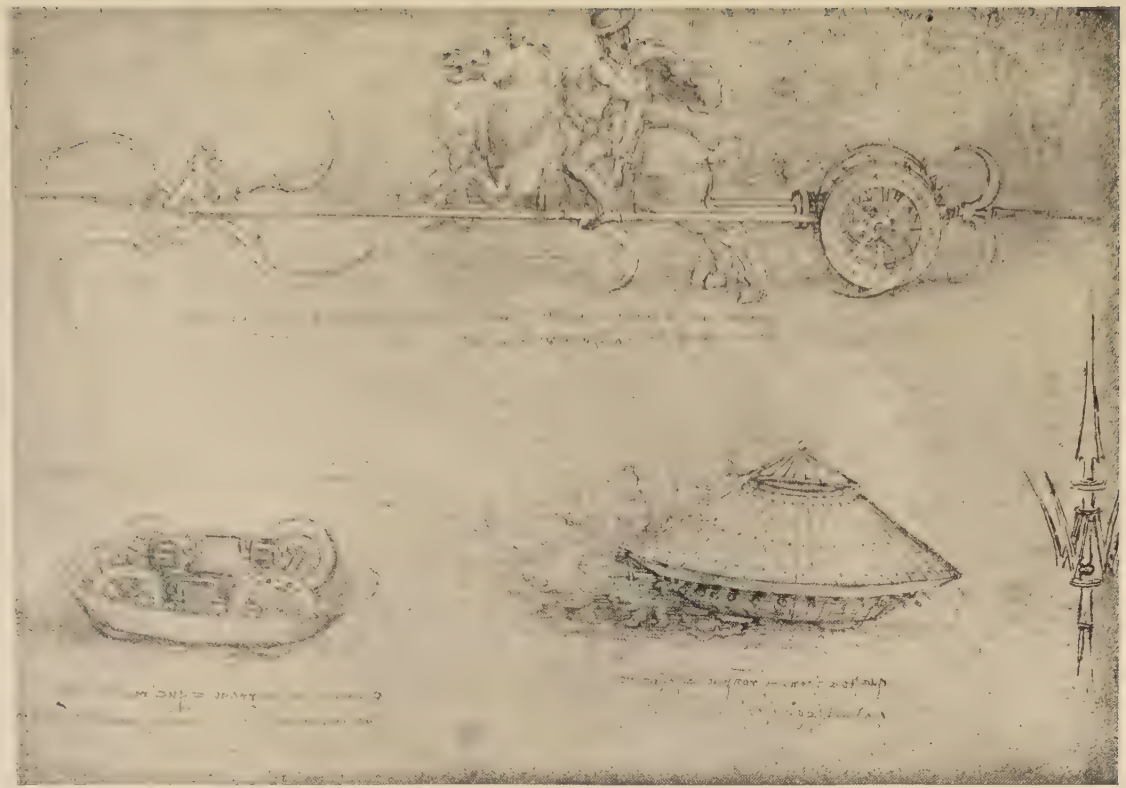
"It was not good," he said at last in deprecating tones; "he said terrible things to me. He said that there was nothing in the world but Mechanics—things like that terrible spider with the bloody revolving arms, which he—no, not he—which *you* have invented."

"What spider? Ah, yes, yes! I understand; you have seen my drawing of the scythed chariot?"

"And he said," resumed Giovanni, "that what men call God is the eternal force by which the hideous spider is moved, by means of which its blood-stained arms revolve; and that this God cares nothing for truth or untruth, for good or evil, for life or death. And that praying to him is bootless, for he is inexorable as mathematics; two and two will never, never make five."

"I see. I see. You torture yourself uselessly. I know how it is."

"No, Messer Leonardo, you do not yet know



Scythed Chariot (Leonardo da Vinci, London).

Photo by Anderson.

all. He said that Christ had died in vain, had not risen triumphant from the grave, had not vanquished death, but that his body lay moldering in the tomb. And when he said this, I burst into weeping, and he had compassion on me, and tried to bring me comfort. And he said: 'Weep not! There is no Christ, but there is Love, Great Love, the daughter of Great Knowledge, who knoweth all, loveth all.' Master, he used your very words! 'Of old,' he said, 'they taught that love came of weakness, of wonder, of ignorance; but I tell you it comes of strength, of truth, of wisdom; for the serpent lied not when he said, Eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and ye shall be as gods.' And then I knew him that he came of the Devil! I cursed him and he withdrew himself; but he said he would come again."

Leonardo listened with as much interest as if this were no longer the delirium of sickness. He felt the gaze of his disciple, now almost calm, but terribly accusatory, sink into the sec et depths of his soul.

"And the most fearsome thing," continued Giovanni, slowly withdrawing himself from the Master, and looking him full in the face with fixed and piercing eyes, "the most fearsome was that, as he spake to me thus, he smiled. Yes, he could smile! He smiled, as you smile upon me now—*you!*"

And his face became suddenly pale as wax, and,

with starting eyes and contort d features, he pushed Leonardo from him, and cried in a wild shout of terror:

"Thou! Thou again! Thou hast cozened me! In the name of God, begone! Get thee behind me, Accursed One!"

At these words the Master rose, and, with compelling eyes fixed on his disciple, he said:

"Giovanni, of a truth you will do well to leave me. You remember it is said in the Scripture, 'He that feareth is not made perfect in love.' If you loved me with perfect love you would have no fear; you would know that all this is delusion and madness; that I am not what men suppose; that I have no Semblance; and that, perchance, I believe more truly in Christ my Saviour than do those who call me Antichrist. Farewell, Giovanni."

His voice shook with inexpressible bitterness, which was, however, unresentful. He rose to go.

"Have I spoken truth?" he asked himself, and felt that if his pupil could only be saved by lies, he still was unable to lie. Boltraffio flung himself upon his knees at Leonardo's feet.

"Master! pardon me. Nay, I know it is madness! I will drive away these hideous thoughts! Only forgive me. Let me stay!"

Leonardo looked at him, his eyes glistening with tenderness; then he bent over him and kissed his brow.

"Then forget not, Giovanni, that you have

promised!" he exclaimed; and added calmly: "Now let us go down; the cold is too nipping here. I cannot leave you in this room till you are completely cured. I have some urgent business on hand, in which you can help me."

XIII

He took his disciple into his own sleeping-chamber, which adjoined the studio, blew up the fire, and when the crackling flame had diffused a pleasant light upon everything, bade Giovanni prepare him a panel for a picture. He hoped that work would calm the sick youth, nor was he mistaken; by degrees Giovanni became completely absorbed in his occupation.

With concentrated and serious attention, as if the task were of the most curious and important in the world, he helped the Master to soak the wood in aqua-vita, bi-sulphate of arsenic, and corrosive sublimate, to keep it from becoming worm-eaten; they filled in the dents and chinks with alabaster, cypress lac, and mastic, and smoothed the unevenness with a plane. As usual, under the hands of Leonardo, the work went on easily as child's play. He talked also, and gave instruction on the making of brushes, the coarser of pigs' bristles fixed in lead, and the finer of squirrels' hair set in goose-quill; of varnish also, and the driers to be used, of Venetian green and ferruginous ochre. A pleasant, pungent,

business-like scent diffused itself through the room, and as Giovanni rubbed the panel lustily with linseed oil, the exertion made him hot. His fever had disappeared. Once, stopping to take breath, he looked at Leonardo, but the latter cried:

"Make haste! make haste! if you let it grow cold the oil won't sink in!"

And Giovanni, bending his back, compressing his lips, and straining his legs, rubbed on with increased energy and good-will.

"How do you feel now?" asked Leonardo.

"Well!" replied the other, smiling.

The rest of the pupils gathered also in the bright room. The comfort and warmth within was redoubled by the howl of the wind and the patter of the rain outside. Salaino came, shivering but light-hearted; Astro, the one-eyed Cyclops; Jacopo and Marco; but Cesare da Sesto, as usual, kept aloof from this friendly circle.

Then the panel was laid aside to dry, and Leonardo discoursed on the purest oil for painting. An earthen dish was brought, in which was white walnut juice covered with amber-coloured grease. Long coils, like lamp-wicks, were laid in it and allowed to drip into a glass vessel.

"See, see!" cried Marco, "what purity! Mine is always turbid, however often I strain it!"

"Do you skin your nuts?" said Leonardo; "if you do not, your colours will turn black."

"Then," said Marco, "the thin peel of a nut

might ruin the best painting in the world! Hear you, lads? you who mock me because I carry out the Master's instructions with mathematical rigidity!"

The pupils laughed and talked and jested while they watched the preparation of the oil. It was late, but no one cared for sleep, and without heeding the protests of Marco the steward, they continually threw new logs upon the fire. All were unaccountably merry.

"Let us tell stories," said Andrea; and began with the tale of the priest who on Holy Saturday took upon himself to sprinkle a particular picture with holy water. "Why so?" asked its painter. "Because it is written that for a good work one shall receive a hundredfold," replied the priest. And presently, as he left the house, the painter from an upper window poured a pail of water on his head and cried: "Here is the hundredfold for the good you have done me in spoiling my best picture."

Other tales followed, and none enjoyed them more than Leonardo, who indeed laughed like a child, nodding his head and wiping tears from his eyes, and cackling with a strange thin laugh, incongruous with his great height and powerful build.

About midnight they agreed it were impossible to go to bed without eating, especially as they had supped sparingly, for Marco kept them on short commons. Astro brought all there was in

the pantry, some stale ham, cheese, a few olives, and some bread. Wine there was none.

"Have you tilted the cask?"

"In all directions. There is not a drop."

"Ah, Marco! Marco! what are we to do? How can we go without wine?"

"Can I buy wine without money?" said Marco.

"There is money, and there shall be wine!" cried Jacopo, tossing a gold piece.

"How got you it, imp of the devil? Marry, stealing again, I suppose! Come here and I 'll box your ears for you," said Leonardo, shaking his finger at him.

"I swear by God, Master, I did not steal it. Cut out my tongue and send me to the pit if I did not win it at dice."

"Well, stolen or not, fetch us some wine."

Jacopo ran off to the Golden Eagle hard by, much frequented by the Swiss mercenaries, and kept open all night; presently he returned with pewter cans. The wine increased the mirth; the little Ganymede holding the vessel high so that beaded bubbles winked on the red liquid; and, overflown with pride in entertaining the company at his own expense, he played pranks and jested and jumped; and, mimicking the hoarse voice of a confirmed toper, he sang the song of the unfrocked monk:

"To the devil with cowl and with frock, oh!
With hood and with scapularie!

Pretty nun, the lord Abbot bemock, oh!
And dance at the junket with me!
Ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho!"

and then the solemn chorus from the Bacchanalian Mass, written in Latin, and sung by the students on festive occasions:

"Who waters wine at this high feast supernal
Shall drown in it for ages sempiternal,
And after roast at fires of realms infernal!"

They drank toasts to the Master's health, to the glory of his studio, to the hopes of future wealth; and Giovanni never supped so much to his liking as at this beggars' feast, on cheese hard as rock, stale bread, and Jacopo's stolen wine. Presently Leonardo said with a smile:

"I have heard, friends, that St. Francis called melancholy the worst of sins, and preached that whoso wished to please God must be cheerful. Let us drink to the wisdom of Francis and to eternal cheerfulness in God."

These words were surprising to all the youths except Giovanni, who understood their intention.

"Eh, Master," said Astro, shaking his head, "it is very well to speak of cheerfulness, but how can we be cheerful while we crawl along the ground like grave-worms? Let the others toast what they please, but I will drink to wings and to the flying-machine. May the devil carry away the laws of gravity and of mechanics which interfere with us."

"Without mechanics you won't fly far, my friend," said the Master, laughing.

After this the party broke up, and Leonardo would not allow Giovanni to return to his cold attic; he aided him to improvise a bed in his own room as near as might be to the hearth, where a few cinders still glowed red.

XIV

Giovanni had learned from Cesare that the Master had all but finished the face of the Christ in the *Last Supper;* he had asked several times to be allowed to see it, but Leonardo had always postponed the matter.

At last, one morning he took the lad to the Refectory, and there, in the place which had been vacant for sixteen years, between St. John and St. James, against the square of the open window, with the background of the quiet evening sky and the blue hills of Zion, Giovanni saw the Christ.

A few days later Leonardo sent him for a rare mathematical book to the house of the alchemist, Sacrobosco. He was returning late in the evening. The air was frosty and still, after a day of high wind and thaw; the pools and the ruts of the road were coated with ice; the low clouds seemed to cling motionless to the purple tops of the larches, in which were a few ruined and deserted nests. Darkness came on apace; on the dim verge of the horizon stretched the long copper

and golden streak where the sun had gone down. The water in the Cantarana Canal, still unfrozen, seemed heavy, black as iron, and unfathomably deep.

Giovanni did not own it to himself, and indeed used every effort to suppress the thought, but he was comparing, not without dismay, Leonardo's two renderings of the Lord's face. If he shut his eyes, both rose before him like living things: the one face that of a brother, and full of human weakness, the face of Him who had agonised in bloody sweat, and prayed a childlike prayer for a miracle; the other, superhuman, calm, wise, alien, and terrible.

And Giovanni thought that, perhaps, notwithstanding their inexplicable contradiction, the one was a likeness no less true than the other.

He grew confused, as if delirium were returning, and sitting on a stone above the black canal waters, he bowed himself in exhaustion, and buried his head in his hands.

"What are you doing here, like a shade on the banks of Acheron?" cried a mocking voice; and he felt a hand on his shoulder, turned, and saw Cesare, like some ill-omened ghost, in the wintry twilight; a long, lean figure, with a long, lean, pale face, and muffled in a long grey cloak. Giovanni rose, and they moved on together, the dead leaves rustling under their feet.

"Does he know we ransacked his papers?" asked Cesare.

"Yes."

"And is not angered. That I expected"; and Cesare laughed maliciously. "Everlasting pardon, of course!"

There was a silence; a crow flew across the canal, cawing hoarsely.

"Cesare," said Boltraffio in a loud voice, "have you seen the face of the Christ in the *Cenacolo?*"

"I have."

"And—what think you of it?"

"What think *you?*" said Cesare, turning abruptly to his companion.

"I can hardly say; but it seems to me——"

"Speak frankly. It does not satisfy you?'

"That is not what I mean. But it seems to me, perhaps, that it is not Christ."

"Not Christ? Who then else?"

Giovanni did not reply; his eyes were on the ground, and, without knowing it, his pace slackened. At last he said:

"That other sketch in coloured chalk, the young Christ—have you seen that?"

"Yes. A Jewish boy with chestnut curls, full lips, and a low brow; the son of old Barucco. You like it better?"

"No. But I was thinking how little alike they are, those two pictures!"

"Little alike? But it is the same face—fifteen years older, that is all! However, it may be you are right. They may be two Christs,

but as like each other as a man and his own phantom."

"As a man and his own phantom!" echoed Giovanni, shuddering and stopping. "What say you, Cesare? A man and his own phantom?"

"Well, what is so alarming in those words? Don't you agree with me?"

They walked on.

"Cesare!" cried Boltraffio suddenly and impulsively, "do you not see what I mean? How could He, the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, whom Leonardo has painted on the *Cenacolo*, how could He have been tortured on the Mount of Olives, not a stone's throw away, till He sweated blood and prayed a human prayer for a miracle? 'Let not that take place, to accomplish which I came into the world, that which I know cannot fail to be! Father, let this cup pass from me!' Cesare, everything is contained in that prayer! Without it there is no Christ, and I would not relinquish it for all the wisdom of Solomon! The Christ who prayed not that prayer was never a man; He did not suffer and die like us!"

"I see your meaning," replied Cesare slowly; "certainly the Christ of the *Cenacolo* never prayed that prayer."

The darkness was falling around them, and Giovanni could not accurately see the face of his companion, which, however, seemed strangely illuminated. Suddenly Cesare stopped, raised his hand, and spoke in a low solemn voice:

"You wish to know whom he has painted, if 't is not the weaker Christ who prayed for a hopeless miracle in the garden of Gethsemane? Well, I will tell you. Remember that beautiful invocation of Leonardo's when he spoke of the laws of the mechanical sciences. 'O divine justice of Thee, Thou Prime Mover!' His Christ is the Prime Mover, who, principle and centre of every movement, is Himself moveless. His Christ is the eternal necessity, which is divine justice, which is the Father's will. 'O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee and I have declared unto these Thy name, that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.' Do you see? Love born of knowledge. '*Grande amore è figlio di grande sapienza.* Great love is the child of great knowledge.' And Leonardo, who alone of men has understood this saying of the Lord's, has incarnated it in his Christ, who loves all because he knows all."

Cesare ceased, and for long they walked silently in the profound calm of the winter twilight. At last Boltraffio said:

"Do you remember, Cesare, how four years ago, you and I, walking along this path together were discussing the *Cenacolo?* Then you mocked at the Master, and said he would never finish the face of the Christ, and I contradicted you. Now it is you who defend him against me. Of a surety I should never have believed that you—

you! would one day speak of him as now you have spoken!"

And Giovanni tried to see his companion's face, but the other turned away.

"Now, I see with joy, Cesare, that you also love him! Yes, you love him, you who wish to hate him; you love him perhaps better than do I!"

"Did you imagine anything else?" replied Cesare, slowly turning to his companion a pale moved face; "and yet I would indeed be glad to hate him, but instead I must love him, for he has done, in the *Last Supper*, what no one has ever done, what perhaps he himself does not understand so well as I—I, his most mortal enemy." And Cesare laughed a forced laugh. "How odd is the human heart!" he went on. "I will confess the truth, Giovanni; perhaps I love him less to-day than I did at the time you have alluded to."

"Why so, Cesare?"

"Perchance because I value my own individuality. To be lowest among the lowest—yes, better that than to be but a member of his body, a toe of his foot! Let Marco find contentment in ladles for the measuring out of paint, and rules for the proportions of noses. *I* should like to ask with which of these Leonardo made that countenance of Christ! True, he does his best to teach us, poor chickens, to fly like eagles from the eagles' nest; for he is compassionate, and sorry for us, as he is sorry for the blind pups in the

yard, or for a lame horse, or for the criminal whom he accompanies to execution that he may watch his dying convulsions. Like the sun, he shines upon everything. Only, see you, my friend, each man hath his own fancy; you may like to be the worm which, in St. Francis' fashion, Leonardo lifts from the highway and sets on a green twig; I 'd sooner be crushed by him!"

"Then, Cesare, if you feel thus, why do you not leave him?"

"And you—why do *you* not leave him? You have burnt your wings like a moth in a candle, and still you flutter round the flame. Perchance I also am fain to burn myself in that flame. Yet, maybe, one hope remains to me!"

"What hope?"

"A foolish hope. The dream of a madman! Yet I often dwell upon it. The hope that one day a man shall arise, unlike him, yet his equal; not Perugino, nor Borgognone, nor Botticelli, nor the great Mantegna—Leonardo surpasses all these; but another, one who is still unknown, reserved for a later day. I would fain see the glory of this new one immense! I would fain look in the face of Messer Leonardo and remind him that even a spared worm like me can prefer another to him, can be pleased in the humiliation of his pride; for, Giovanni, he is proud as Lucifer, in spite of his lamblike meekness and his universal charity."

He broke off abruptly, and Giovanni felt his hand tremble.

"Hark you, Giovanni," he said in a changed voice, "who told you I loved him? You never guessed it?"

"He told me himself."

"He? Then he believes——"

His voice broke. Nothing remained to be said, and each was lost in his own thoughts, his own griefs. At the next cross-road they parted.

Giovanni, with eyes on the ground, walked mechanically along the narrow path skirting the canal in whose dark waters no star was reflected. He repeated to himself, scarce consciously, "As like as a man and his own phantom! His own phantom!"

XV

At the beginning of March, 1499, and at the moment when he least expected it, Leonardo received his salary, which had been for two years unpaid. It was reported at this time that Il Moro, overwhelmed by the news of the alliance concluded against him by the Doge of Venice, the Pope, and the King of France, intended to flee to the German Emperor upon the first appearance in Lombardy of the French forces; and that it was in order to secure the fidelity of his subjects during his absence that he lightened the taxes, paid his creditors, and heaped largesses upon his

friends. A little later Leonardo received a fresh mark of his patron's favour: the gift of sixteen perches of vineyard land, acquired from the monastery of San Vittore near the Porta Vercellina, "which," so ran the deed of gift, "Ludovico Maria Sforza, Duke of Milan, confers on Leonardo da Vinci, the Florentine, most famous of painters."

Leonardo went to express his thanks to the Duke, and was not granted an interview till very late in the evening, owing to the pressure of state affairs. Il Moro had passed the whole day in tedious conversation with secretaries and treasurers, in verifying accounts for munition of war, in loosing old knots and tying new ones in that web of deceit and treachery, which had pleased him well when he had been the spidery master of the threads, but which was another matter now he found himself in the position of a fly.

His business despatched, the Duke went to the Gallery of Bramante, which looked down upon the castle moat. The stillness of the night was broken at times by the blare of a trumpet, by the challenge of sentinels, by the clank of the drawbridge chains. As soon as he had entered the gallery, his page, Ricciardetto, fixed torches in iron sconces against the wall, and handed his master a gold platter with small pieces of bread. These Ludovico threw to the swans which, attracted by the reflection from the windows, had come sailing over the black mirror of the water

in the moat. Isabella d'Este, his lost Beatrice's sister, had sent him these swans from Mantua, where the flat shores of the Mincio, thick with reeds and willow-trees, were a renowned breeding-place for great flocks of these beautiful birds. Feeding them was his chief recreation after the business and anxieties of the day. They reminded him of his childhood, by the weed-grown pools of Vigevano; and here in the gloomy castle moat, among frowning embrasured walls, high towers, cannon balls, and bombards, the noiseless snow-white creatures, gliding like phantoms through the silver moonlit mist upon the scarce visible water in which stars were reflected, seemed to him full of mystery and charm.

Leaning out of the window, and still absorbed in his amusement, the Duke did not hear the creak of a small door, nor notice the approach of a chamberlain, until, with a deep reverence, the man had handed him a paper.

"What is this?" asked the Duke.

"Messer Borgonzio Botta sends Your Excellency the account for munition of war, powder, and bullets; he is grieved that he must trouble your lordship, but at dawn the convoy starts for Mortara."

Il Moro snatched the paper angrily, crumpled it, and threw it aside.

"How many times have I said I transact no business after supper? Good God! soon I shall not be allowed even to sleep!"

The chamberlain, still bowing, retreated backwards, announcing in a low voice which the Duke need not hear unless it so minded him:

"Messer Leonardo."

"Leonardo! Why not have brought him in before? Conduct him hither at once."

And returning to the feeding of his swans he added to himself, "Leonardo will not worry me!"

When the painter entered, Il Moro smiled at him much as he smiled at his pets; and when Leonardo would have knelt, restrained him, and kissed his forehead.

"Welcome! 'T is long since I have seen you. How fare you, friend?"

"I have to thank Your Excellency——"

"Enough! Enough! You are worthy of better gifts. Give me time, and I will recompense you properly."

Then they talked of the diving-bell, the shoes for walking the water, the wings. But when Leonardo would have diverted the conversation to business, to the fortifications, the Martesana Canal, the casting of the great *Cavallo*, Ludovico evaded the subject with an air of disgust. Suddenly, as if remembering something, he fell into a fit of abstraction, oblivious of his companion's presence, sitting quite silent, with eyes on the ground, and Leonardo, supposing himself dismissed, would have taken his leave. The Duke nodded absently, but when the painter had reached the door he recalled

him, and laying both his hands on his shoulders, looked at him with a long sad gaze.

"Farewell, my Leonardo. Who knows if ever again we shall see each other, we two alone, face to face, as at this minute!"

"Is Your Excellency going to abandon us?"

Il Moro sighed heavily and paused before replying.

"We have been together for sixteen years," he said at last, "and in all that time I have never disapproved you, nor, I think, have you disapproved me. The vulgar may murmur; yet I think in after ages, when they speak of Leonardo, they will have a good word for Il Moro, his friend."

The painter, who did not like outbursts of tenderness, replied in the one courtly phrase which he reserved for moments of necessity:

"I would I had more than a single life to dedicate to the service of Your Highness."

"I believe it," said Ludovico; "some day, Leonardo, perhaps you will remember me, and will weep——"

And himself scarcely restraining a sob, he embraced him, kissing his lips.

"Leave me now, and may God go with you!" he said; and after Leonardo had gone he remained long in the Bramante Gallery, where no sound broke the stillness save the slow droppings from the torches, watching his swans, and thinking strange thoughts. He fancied that across his dark, and even criminal, life Leonardo had passed

like these white swans across the black waters of the castle moat, under those embrasured walls, towers, and magazines; Leonardo, useless as they, delightful, immaculate, and pure.

XVI

Late as was the hour, the artist, having left the Duke, went to the Convento of Saint Francis to inquire for his pupil, Giovanni Boltraffio, who was lying there grievously sick of a brain fever.

Visiting his former teacher, Fra Benedetto, in December, 1498, Giovanni had found Fra Paolo, a Dominican from Florence, with him, and this man had given them the account of Savonarola's death.

The execution—thus Fra Paolo related—had been appointed for nine of a May morning, to take place in the Piazza della Signoria, exactly where had been the burning of vanities and the ordeal by fire. A pyre was raised at the end of a long platform; and above it a gibbet—a stout beam driven into the ground, with a cross-piece, from which dangled three halters and iron chains. No effort of the carpenters could prevent this erection from looking like a cross. The square, the loggias, the windows and roofs of the houses were thronged by as great a multitude as had assembled for the trial by fire. The condemned—Fra Girolamo Savonarola, Fra Domenico da Pescia, and Fra Silvestro Maruffi—

issued from the Palazzo Vecchio, advanced along the platform and stood before the Bishop of Pagagliotti, the papal nuncio. The bishop rose, took Savonarola's hand, and in trembling tones, not daring to meet the unfaltering gaze of the monk, he pronounced the ritual of degradation. Almost hesitatingly he uttered the concluding words: "*Separo te ab Ecclesia militante atque triumphante.*" (I cut you off from the Church militant and triumphant.)

To which Fra Girolamo replied: "*Militante, non triumphante; hoc enim tuum non est.*" (From the Church militant, yes; from the Church triumphant, no; that is not within your power!)

The three brothers were unfrocked; then, covered merely with their under-tunics, they advanced farther and stood before the tribune of the Apostolic Commissaries who pronounced them heretics and schismatics; and then again before the "*Otto Uomini della Repubblica Fiorentina*" (The Eight of the Florentine Republic), who solemnly, in the name of the people, pronounced the death sentence. During this last progress, Fra Silvestro stumbled and nearly fell, and Fra Domenico and Savonarola likewise were seen to totter. Later it was discovered that this was due to a jest of certain of the Sacred Troop of Youthful Inquisitors, who had crept under the planks and run nails through them, so as to wound the naked feet of the condemned.

Fra Silvestro, the imbecile, was the first taken

to the scaffold. With his customary apathetic expression, seemingly unconscious of what was befalling him, he ascended the steps; yet when the hangman put the noose upon his neck he cried, raising his eyes to heaven: "Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." And not waiting for the executioner's thrust, he leaped deliberately and fearlessly from the ladder. Then Fra Domenico, who had expected his turn with joyous impatience, immediately on receiving the signal, sprang to the scaffold smiling ecstatically as if summoned to Paradise.

Fra Silvestro's body hung from one end of the cross-beam, Fra Domenico's from the other; the centre was for Savonarola. As he neared the place, he stood still, and looked down upon the crowd. Then there was a silence, profound as once in the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, when his expectant followers awaited the commencement of his preaching. But now he said no word; and the halter was adjusted; then a voice called out (and no one knew if it were mockery or the wild cry of agonising faith): "Perform a miracle, O prophet! Perform a miracle!" But the executioner had already swung off the martyr from the ladder.

Then an old workman, whose face was resigned yet full of ascetic fervour, and who for several days had had the custody of the pyre, crossed himself hurriedly and threw the lighted torch upon the pile, ejaculating, as Savonarola had

The Death of Savonarola (Florence).

Photo by Alinari.

done when he had set fire to the "vanities and anathemata"—"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!"

The flames leaped into the air; but the wind blew strongly and drove them in the contrary direction from the scaffold. Wherefore the crowd, smitten with a sudden fear, fell into tumult, and swayed hither and thither, pressing upon and trampling one another, and bursting into the cry: "They burn not! Lo! a miracle! a miracle!" But the wind fell and the flames rose straight and high, and licked round Fra Girolamo's corpse. And the cord wherewith his hands had been tied was sundered by the fire, and the hands fell loose and dropped and moved in the flame; and to many of the people it seemed that for the last time he blessed them.

When the fire was spent, and of the three brothers there remained only charred bones and morsels of blackened flesh quivering on the iron chains, then the faithful pressed forward and would have collected relics of the martyrs. But the guards, driving them away, piled the ashes into a cart and took them to the Ponte Vecchio with intent to cast them into the river. And on the way thither the Piagnoni succeeded in snatching some few handfuls of sacred ashes, and certain rags of flesh which they believed to have been the heart of their murdered prophet.

Fra Paolo ended his recital; and he showed his hearers a little purse in which he had saved some

of these sacred ashes. Fra Benedetto kissed it again and again, watering it with his tears; then the two monks went together to vespers. When they returned to the cell, they found Giovanni lying senseless on the ground before the crucifix, clutching the little casket of ashes in his frozen fingers.

For three months the young man lay between life and death; and Fra Benedetto never left him day or night. He was long delirious, and the good monk shuddered as he listened to his wanderings. He raved of Savonarola, of Leonardo, of that blessed Mother of God, who, drawing with her finger on the sand of the desert, taught the divine Child geometrical figures and the laws of eternal necessity.

"For what dost Thou pray?" the sick man would repeat with unutterable grief: "Knowest Thou not that there is no relief—no miracle—? The cup cannot pass from Thee; even as a straight line cannot fail to be the shortest way between two points."

He was haunted by the vision of the two faces of the Lord, unlike, yet like as a man and his own phantom: the one overborne with human woe and weakness, who in His agony had prayed for a miracle; the other the face of the Omnipotent, of the Omniscient, of the Word made flesh, of the Prime Mover. They were turned towards each other like irreconcilable and eternal foes. And while Giovanni gazed at them, gradually

the one face, that of the Lamb of God, gentle, sorrowful, long-suffering, became obscured; and changed into the face of the demon which Leonardo had once drawn, caricaturing Savonarola. And this demon-face, denouncing the semblance of the Omnipotent, named him Antichrist.

Fra Benedetto's loving care saved the life of his adopted son. By the beginning of June Giovanni had so far recovered as to be able to walk; and then, notwithstanding all the warning and the entreaties of the affectionate monk, he returned to Leonardo's studio.

Towards the close of July the army of Louis XII. of France, commanded by Marshal d'Aubigny, Louis of Luxemburg, and Gian Giacomo Trivulzio, crossed the Alps and burst down upon the plains of Lombardy.

BOOK X

CALM WATERS—1499–1500

"Le onde sonore e luminose sono governate dalle stesse leggi che governans le onde delle acque: l'angolo incidente deve eguagliare l' angolo riflettente."—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

(The waves of light and sound are governed by the same mechanical law as that governing waves of water: the angle of incidence equals the angle of reflection.)

"Il duca ha perso lo stato e la roba e la libertà; e nessuna sua opera si fini per lui."—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

(The Duke has lost state, wealth, and liberty; not one of his works will be finished by himself.)

I

THE Duke's treasury, a subterranean chamber very long and narrow and piled with huge oak chests, was entered from the north-west tower of the Rocchetta by a small iron door set in the thickness of the wall and adorned with an unfinished painting by Leonardo. On the first night of September, 1499, Messer Ambrogio Ferrari the Court treasurer, and Messer Borgonzio Botta the comptroller of the ducal revenue, with their assistants, shovelled coins, pearls, and other treasures hastily from the oak chests, threw them into leathern bags, which they sealed

with the ducal seal, and consigned to servants to be packed upon mules. Already two hundred and forty bags had been sealed and thirty mules had been loaded, yet the guttering candles still showed that the chests contained great heaps of silver. Il Moro, meanwhile, sat at a portable writing-desk heaped with registers and account-books, but gazed blankly at the flame of the candle, and paid no attention to the work of the treasurers. Since the terrible news had reached him of the defeat of Galeazzo Sanseverino, the commander of his forces, and of the inevitable nearing of the French, he seemed to have fallen into some strange torpor which resembled insensibility.

Presently Ambrogio Ferrari inquired whether the Duke wished to take the gold and silver plate also; but Ludovico, after frowning and apparently making an effort to attend, turned away, waved his hand, and once more fixed his eyes upon the candle. The question was repeated, but this time he did not even feign attention; and presently the treasurers, unable to obtain an answer, went away. Il Moro remained alone.

A few minutes later, the old chamberlain announced Messer Bernardino da Corte, the newly appointed commandant of the fortress. The Duke roused himself, passed his hand over his brow, and bade his approach.

Ludovico, distrustful of the scions of great families, liked raising men from nothing, making

the first last, and the last first. This Bernardino was the son of a footman, and had himself in his boyhood worn the Court livery. The Duke had, however, exalted him to the highest offices of state, and now, as a proof of final confidence in his ability and good faith, had charged him with the defence of the castle of Milan, his last stronghold.

The Duke received the new governor graciously, bade him sit, spread before him the plan of the castle, explained the signals concerted between the fortress and the town. For example, in the daytime a curved gardening knife (or at night a flaming torch) displayed from the main tower of the castle was to show the need for instant help; a white sheet, hung on the tower of Bona, signified treachery within the walls; a chair suspended by a rope meant lack of powder; a petticoat, lack of wine; a pair of breeches, scarcity of bread; an earthenware pot, the need of a doctor.

Il Moro had himself invented this code, and was childishly pleased with it, as if in it lay somewhat his chief hope of safety.

"Remember, Bernardino," thus he concluded his exordium, "everything has been foreseen. You have sufficiency of money, powder, provisions, firearms; the three thousand mercenaries are already paid; the fortress is in your hands, and should be able to stand a three years' siege. I, however, only ask you to hold it for three months;

if at the end of that time I have not returned to your relief, you must do what you think best. Now you know all. Farewell, my son; may the Lord protect you!" And he favoured him with an embrace.

The governor of the castle dismissed, Il Moro bade the page prepare his camp bed. He prayed, and laid himself down, but sleep proved impossible. He lighted a candle, took a packet of papers from his wallet, and found a poem by one Antonio Cammelli da Pistoia, Bellincioni's rival, who on the first appearance of the French had deserted his patron. The poem represented the war between Ludovico and Louis XII. as a conflict between a winged serpent and a cock:

"Italia's lord, we lay to heart thy fate,
For good it is to learn by other men's undoing.
O bitter word to speak, the loss of all things ruing—
When fickle fortune smiled, I was a potentate!
The world to Ludovico seemed a fief but late;
Itself and all its glory appeared but of his doing;
Yet Heav'n, his stomach high and proud presumption viewing,
His every hope and scheme did suddenly frustrate."

The Duke's soul was pervaded by melancholy, which was not, however, entirely disagreeable. It was partly the pride of a martyr. He remembered the servility of the sonnets the same poet had dedicated to him not long ago:

"Speak, potent lord, and say, The world to me is given!"

It was midnight, and the flame of the dying candle flickered and grew dim, but still the Duke continued to pace the gloomy room, thinking of his griefs, of the injustice of blind fortune, of the ingratitude of men.

"What wrong have I done them? Why do they hate me? They call me a villain and an assassin; but what have I done more than Romulus who killed his brother, and Cæsar, and Alexander, and all the heroes of antiquity? Were *they* villains and assassins? My desire was to give them a new age of gold, such as had not been seen since the days of Augustus and the Antonines. A little longer, and under my rule Italy would have been united; the laurels of Apollo would have bloomed, and the olives of Pallas; the reign of peace would have begun, and the worship of the muses. First among princes, I sought greatness not in deeds of war, but in the fruits of golden peace, in the protection of talent: Bramante, Pacioli, Caradosso, Leonardo, and how many others? In days to come, when the noise of arms shall be forgotten, their names will be remembered, together with the name of Sforza. To what a height should not I, the new Pericles, have raised my new Athens, but for this horde of northern barbarians who have cut short my work? Why, O my God, *why* is this permitted?"

And, his head drooping on his breast, he thought again of the lines:

"O bitter word to speak, the loss of all things ruing—
When fickle fortune smiled, I was a potenate!"

The candle flared for the last time, illuminating the vaulting of the roof, and the fresco of Mercury above the treasure-house door. Then it sank down and went out. The Duke shuddered, for he thought it a bad omen. Fearful of awakening Ricciardetto, he groped his way to the bed, lay down again, and this time fell asleep at once.

He dreamed that he knelt to Madonna Beatrice, who having discovered his intrigue with Lucrezia was taxing him with it, and striking him full in the face. He was pained, yet rejoiced that she had returned to life. He submitted to her chastisement, caught her hands that he might kiss them, and wept for love. But suddenly there stood before him, not Beatrice, but the Mercury of Leonardo's fresco over the door. The god seized him by the hair, crying:

"O fool, and blind! In what dost thou yet hope? Will all your deceits save you from the just punishment of God? Murderer and villain!"

When he awoke, the morning light was shining on the windows. The lords, the knights, the captains, the German mercenaries, who were to escort him to the Court of Maximilian, in all, some

three thousand horsemen, were awaiting his presence by the main road which led north—towards the Alps.

Ludovico mounted, and rode to the Monastery delle Grazie, that he might pray for the last time beside the grave of his lost Beatrice. Later, when the sun was high in the heavens, the cortège began its march through Como, Bellaggio, Bormio, Bolzano, and Brisina, to the Tyrol, and the city of Innsbruck.

II

The journey took over a fortnight, for a rainy autumn had spoiled the roads. On the 18th of September, the Duke, being fatigued and indisposed, determined to pass the night in a mountain cave, which afforded shelter to a few herdsmen. It would not have been difficult to find a more commodious resting-place, but Il Moro deliberately chose this wild spot for his reception of the ambassador from Maximilian. The watch-fires illumined the stalactites and the natural vaulting of the cavern; pheasants were roasting for supper; and the Duke, seated on a camp-chair, his feet on a brazier, and his head muffled—for he was suffering from toothache—reflected, not without a certain satisfaction, on the greatness of his misfortunes. Lucrezia Crivelli, bright and gentle as ever, was preparing an anodyne of wine, pepper, cloves, and other potent spices for the illustrious sufferer.

The Emperor Maximilian (Rubens, Vienna).

Photo by Hanfstaengl.

"So, then, Messer Odoardo," said Il Moro to the Emperor's envoy, "you can tell His Majesty where, and in what condition you found the legitimate ruler of Lombardy."

Ludovico was in one of the fits of loquacity which sometimes succeeded to long periods of silence and dejection. "Foxes have holes," he went on, "and birds of the air have nests, but I have not where to lay my head. Corio," he turned to the chronicler, "in compiling your annals omit not description of this lodging, the refuge of the last heir of the great Sforzas, of the descendant of Anglus, the Trojan, the comrade of Æneas."

"My lord," said Odoardo, "your misfortunes deserve the pen of a new Tacitus."

Lucrezia brought the anodyne, and the Duke paused to look at her admiringly. Her pale clear face was bright in the rosy glow of the fire-light, her black hair coiled smoothly above her pure forehead, upon which glowed the single diamond of the *ferroniera*. She looked at her lover with her grave, innocent, and observant eyes; on her lips was a smile of almost maternal tenderness.

"Sweet heart!" thought Ludovico, "here is one who will never betray me!" and receiving the medicament from her hand, he again turned to the chronicler and said, with swelling sententiousness: "Corio, set down likewise this: 'true friendship is proved in the furnace of affliction, as gold is proved in the fire.' "

"Eh, old fellow, why so gloomy?" cried Janachi, seating himself at the Duke's feet, and slapping his knee, "a truce to this black bile! There 's remedy for every ill save death, and trust me, old man, it 's better to be a living ass than a dead prince! Kiki riki! Look! look! what a throng of ass-saddles we have here!"

"Well, what of it?" asked the Duke, wearily.

"*Moro mio, moro mio*, there 's an old story which says——"

"Well—go on; relate the story!"

The fool jumped to his feet, ringing his bells and shaking his rattle.

"Once upon a time there was a king in Naples, and he bade Giotto the painter make him a wall-picture of his kingdom. And the saucy painter drew a stout Ass carrying on his back a Saddle with the royal arms, the sceptre, and the crown; and the Ass was sniffing at another Saddle also emblazoned with arms, sceptre, and crown. Wherefore, dear sir, I say to thee, to-day the people of Milan are sniffing at the French Saddle. Let them alone! Soon enough will it gall their backs, and they 'll wish to be quit of it!"

"*Stulti aliquando sapientes*," said the Duke, with a melancholy smile at this piece of imbecility. "Corio, write in the chronicle——"

But he did not finish the phrase, for the snorting of horses, the tramp of hoofs, and the buzz of voices were heard outside the cavern. Mariolo Pusterla the chamberlain, his face pale and agi-

tated, entered hastily and whispered with Calco, the chief secretary.

"What has happened?" asked the Duke.

No one was willing to reply, and all eyes fell.

"Your Excellency—" began the secretary, in trembling tones, and broke off.

"May the Lord support Your Excellency!" said Luigi Marliani. "Be prepared; bad news has arrived from Milan."

"Speak, then; speak! For God's sake, speak!" cried Ludovico, turning pale. Then looking towards the entrance, he caught sight of a man splashed with mud, and travel-worn. The Duke brushed Marliani aside, hurried to the messenger, and snatching a letter from his hand, broke the seal, read with lightning glance, uttered a cry, and sank senseless to the ground. Marliani and Pusterla were barely in time to break his fall.

On the 17th of September, the feast of San Satiro, the traitor Bernardino da Corte had opened the gates of the Castle of Milan to the French marshal, Gian Giacomo Trivulzio.

Ludovico was practised in the simulation of diplomatic faintness. This time, however, the physicians had trouble in restoring him to consciousness. When at last he regained his senses, he sighed, made the sign of the cross, and murmured:

"Since Judas there never was a traitor like Bernardino da Corte."

And for the rest of the evening he did not utter a single word.

A few days later the Duke arrived at Innsbruck, where he was graciously received by the Emperor and lodged in the imperial palace. One evening he was walking up and down his chamber, and dictating to Bartolomeo Calco credentials for the envoys whom he was secretly despatching to the Sultan. The face of the old secretary expressed nothing but attention, and his pen travelled rapidly over the paper, as the words fell from his master's lips.

" 'Firm and invariable in our good disposition towards Your Highness' "—so ran the document— " 'and trusting that in the task of recovering our lost dominions we may look for aid to the magnanimity of the powerful ruler of the Ottoman Empire, we have resolved to send three different messengers by three different roads, so that at least one of them may arrive and present our letter. The Pope, who by nature is perfidious and wicked——' "

Here the pen of the dispassionate secretary stopped; he looked up, wrinkling his brows. He could not believe his ears.

"The Pope?"

"Yes, the Pope. Go on."

The secretary looked at his work again, and the pen scratched faster than before.

"'The Pope, being by nature wicked and perfidious, has instigated the French King to carry war into Lombardy.'"

Then came the list of French victories.

" 'Dismayed by these misfortunes,'" continued Il Moro frankly, " 'we have judged it prudent to seek refuge at the Court of the Emperor Maximilian, while awaiting the assistance of Your Highness. All have betrayed us; but more than the rest, Bernardino' "—here his voice shook—"'Bernardino da Corte, a serpent warmed in our bosom, a slave whom we had heaped with favours and benefactions; a traitor like unto Judas'— Nay, 't is vain to speak of Judas to an infidel; scratch out 'Judas.' "

He prayed the Sultan to assail Venice by sea and by land, assuring him of easy victory and the complete destruction of that secular enemy of the Ottomans, the arrogant Republic of St. Mark.

" 'And we pray Your Highness to remember,' " he concluded, " 'that in this war, as in every other undertaking, all we have is at the disposal of Your Highness, who in all Europe will find no more faithful ally than Ourselves.' "

He had approached the table and seemed desirous of adding yet another few words; but in a sudden access of discouragement he waved his hand, and threw himself on a seat. Calco carefully strewed the wet writing with sand; then he looked up and saw that the Duke had covered his face with his hands, and was weeping, his shoulders shaking with sobs.

"Lord, why hast Thou permitted this? Where, where is Thine eternal justice?" he mourned. Then uncovering his distorted face, which at that

moment seemed to belong to some feeble old woman, he said:

"Bartolomeo, you know that I repose confidence in you. Tell me, on your conscience, am I acting wisely?"

"Does Your Excellency refer to the embassy to the Grand Turk?"

Il Moro nodded.

The old man wrinkled his forehead and puffed his lips meditatively.

"Certes, those who hunt the wolves must howl with them; yet if we look at the matter from another point of view—in fine, if I am permitted to counsel Your Excellency, I would say, wait!"

"I have waited. Now I will demonstrate that the Duke of Milan is not to be tossed aside like a mere pawn. My friend, I have been ever on the side of right, and I have been most iniquitously abused. Who shall blame me if I appeal, not only to the Grand Turk, but to the very Devil himself?"

"Yet an invasion by the infidel," suggested the secretary, "might perchance be cause of grave peril to the Christian Church."

"God forbid, Bartolomeo! I have considered that. I would suffer a thousand deaths rather than bring damage to our holy Mother Church. But hark you! You do not fully understand my design."

At these words his lips took on their old rapa-

cious smile. "We will brew these villains such a broth," he continued; "we will entangle them in such nets, that none of them shall look again on God's world! But the Grand Turk!—why, the Grand Turk is no more than a tool in my hands! When the time is ripe we will cast him aside, and then we will root out all that vile sect of Mahometans, and free the sacred sepulchre of the Lord from the unclean domination of infidel dogs!"

Calco discreetly lowered his eyes and made no answer.

"This is bad," he said to himself; "these are dreams; in all this there is no policy. He lets himself be carried too far, and he perceives not consequences."

But that night Ludovico, animated by hope in God and in the Grand Turk, prayed long before his favourite picture, by Leonardo, in which the Virgin was portrayed with the features and smile of Cecilia, Countess Bergamini.

III

Ten days before the surrender of the castle, the French marshal, Trivulzio, had made entry into Milan amid the pealing of bells and the acclamation of the populace. The King's entry was fixed for the 6th of October, and the citizens were preparing for his reception. The two great angels which, fifty years earlier in the days of

the "Repubblica Ambrosiana," had represented the genii of popular liberty, were taken from the cathedral treasury for use in the royal procession. Long disuse had stiffened the springs by which their gilded wings were moved, and they were accordingly sent for repair to the Court mechanician, Leonardo da Vinci.

Early one autumnal morning, while it was still dark, Leonardo sat at his desk, busy with his calculations and his geometrical designs. Of late he had resumed his study of aërostatics, and was constructing another flying-machine. Its skeleton was spread across the room, not, like its predecessor, resembling a bat, but rather a gigantic swallow. One of the wings was completed; slender, sharply outlined, beautiful in form and texture, it rose from floor to ceiling, and under its shadow Astro was working at the two wooden angels of the former Milanese Republic. In this latest apparatus Leonardo had determined to follow, as closely as he might, the structure of those winged creatures which nature had provided as models for a flying-machine. He still hoped to solve the problem by close observance of mechanical laws; but though apparently he knew all that could be known, there was still something which eluded his comprehension, and which perhaps lay outside these laws with which he was so familiar. As in his earlier experiments, he found himself brought up against that subtle dividing line which separates the creations of

nature from the work of human hands; the structure of the living body from the structure of the lifeless machine; and he began to think he was aiming at the impossible—the irrational.

"Thank God, that is finished!" exclaimed Astro, winding up the springs of the wooden angels.

Their heavy wings moved, and in the resultant waft of air the delicate wing of the great swallow stirred and rustled. The smith looked at it with inexpressible tenderness.

"The time I have squandered on these stupid monsters!" he exclaimed, pushing the angels away. "From this out, Master, you may say what you please, but I will not go from this room till I have finished my swallow! Give me, pr'ythee, the design for the tail."

"It is not ready, Astro. It demands further calculation."

"But, Master, you promised it to me three days ago!"

"It cannot be helped. The tail of our bird is the rudder. The smallest mistake will ruin the whole."

"You know best, I suppose! I will get on with the second wing."

"We had better wait. It may be necessary to introduce some modification."

The smith very carefully lifted the cane skeleton, overlaid with a network of bullocks' tendons; he turned it round, and contemplated it under

every aspect. Then, his voice thick and trembling with excitement, he cried:

"Master, be not wroth, but hear! If your calculations lead you to the conclusion that this machine also is useless, I swear to you that none the less *I* intend to fly. Yes, I will fly in spite of all your damnable mechanics. I have no longer patience for waiting, because——"

He stopped short. Leonardo gazed at the wide, irregular, obstinate face, impressed with a single, senseless, all-absorbing idea.

"Messere," he added, more quietly, "be so kind as to say plainly, are we going to fly, or are we not?"

Leonardo had not the heart to tell him the naked truth.

"We cannot be quite certain till we have made the experiment," he replied; "but I think we shall fly."

"That is enough; I ask no more," said the mechanic, clapping his hands. "If *you* say we shall fly, then the thing is done."

He presently burst into a great laugh.

"What the devil amuses you?" asked Leonardo.

"Ah, forgive me, Master! I am always disturbing you. But when I fall a-thinking of the poor folk of Milan, and of the French soldiers, and Il Moro, and the King, I have to laugh because I feel so sorry for them. Poor little creeping worms, poor little jumping grasshoppers! Always on the same plot of earth to which they are

chained by their feet, they fight and they bite each other, and they think they are doing some very great thing! How they will stare and gape when they see men alive and flying! I misdoubt that they will believe their eyes. 'These be two gods,' they will say. Astro, a god! I doubt the whole world will be changed. I doubt wars and laws will be done with, and masters and slaves. We cannot conceive how it will be! Soaring up to heaven like the choirs of angels, all the people will shout Hosanna! O Messer Leonardo, Messer Leonardo! is it true that verily thus it will be?"

He spoke wildly, like one in delirium.

"Poor fool!" thought Leonardo; "what blind faith! What is to be done? How can I tell him the truth? He will go crazed!"

At this moment there was a great knock at the street door, then a noise of voices and steps, and then a rap at the door of the studio.

"What devil comes at this hour?" growled Astro. "A pox on him! Who is there? You won't see the Master. He has gone away from Milan."

"'T is I, Astro—Luca Pacioli, the mathematician! Open, open, for God's sake!"

The smith opened and let the friar enter. His face was blanched with terror. Leonardo asked him hurriedly what had happened.

"To me, Messer Leonardo, nought—or leastways of that I will speak later. I come from the castle. Oh, Messer Leonardo! The Gascon

bowmen—in fact the French—I saw it with my own eyes! *They are destroying your 'Cavallo.'* Let us run! Let us run!"

"Soft!" said the painter, though he also had paled. "What shall we do by running?"

"But you cannot sit here with folded hands while your masterpiece is perishing? I have a recommendation to Monsieur de la Trémouille. We must implore him——"

"We are too late."

"No, no! there is still time! We can run by the garden, through the hedge. If we but make haste!"

Dragged along by the monk, Leonardo set forth for the castle. On the way Fra Luca told him of his own misadventure. The *Lanzknechts* had plundered the cellar of the *Canonica* of San Simpliciano, where he dwelt; and being drunken, had wrought havoc through the house; and in Fra Luca's cell, having chanced on certain geometrical models made in crystal, had taken them for instruments of magic, and smashed them to atoms.

"My poor innocent crystals, which had done them no manner of wrong!" mourned the friar. Reaching the piazza before the castle, they saw a young French dandy attended by a numerous suite on the drawbridge.

"Maître Gilles!" cried Fra Luca, overjoyed; and he explained to Leonardo that this was a considerable and authoritative personage; his

title, "Whistler to the Wood-hens"; his office, to teach the finches, magpies, parrots, and thrushes of the most Christian king their feats of singing, talking, dancing, and other performances. Rumour asserted that the "wood-hens" were not the only bipeds who danced to the piping of Maître Gilles; and altogether Fra Luca had long felt that he must be presented with his books (richly bound) *De Divina Proportione* and *Summa Aritmetica*.

"Fra Luca," said Leonardo, "do not lose your opportunity—attend Maître Gilles. I can manage my own case."

"No, no," said the other, somewhat ashamed, "I can wait; or I will just fly to him for an instant and learn whither he is going, and in a trice I will be back with you—go you on towards Monsieur de la Trémouille."

And gathering up the skirts of his brown habit, his bare feet shod with clattering wooden pattens, the nimble monk ran after the "Whistler to the Wood-hens"; while Leonardo crossed the drawbridge and entered the inner court of the castle.

IV

The morning mists were rising, and the watch-fires already dying down. The court-yard was crowded with cannon, ammunition, camp equipage, stable provender, and refuse. All around were movable booths and cooking-spits, empty

barrels serving as card-tables, hogsheads of wine, barrows of provisions; great noises of laughter, curses, quarrellings in many tongues, blasphemies, drunken shoutings and songs. At times an interval of sudden stillness when officers of rank passed. At times drums beat and brazen trumpets gave signal to the Rhenish and Suabian *Lanzknechts*, or Alpine horns were blown from the walls by mercenaries from the free cantons of Uri and Unterwalden.

Making his way through the crowd of men and things, Leonardo reached the centre of the square and found that the *Colossus*, the happy labour for years of his maturest art, was still intact. The great Duke, conqueror of Lombardy, Francesco Attendolo Sforza, with his bald head, in form like that of some Roman emperor, and his expression of leonine cruelty and vulpine cunning, erect as ever, still sat his huge plunging charger and trampled on his foe.

A great crowd of archers of various nationalities surrounded the statue, disputing each in his own language, and gesticulating. Leonardo gathered that a contest was imminent between a French and a German marksman, who, after drinking four tankards of wine were to shoot at a distance of fifty paces at the birthmark on the cheek of the great Sforza. The paces were measured; lots were drawn as to who should shoot first; the wine was poured out. The German drank the fill of a tankard without

drawing breath, another, and another, and another. Then he took his aim, bent the bow, launched his arrow, and missed the mark. The arrow grazed the cheek, and took off the tip of the left ear, but did no further damage. It was now the turn of the Frenchman. He had brought his arbalist to his shoulder, when a commotion arose among the onlookers. The crowd divided, making space for the procession of a knight and his escort of resplendent followers. He rode past, not heeding the marksmen.

"Who is that?" inquired Leonardo.

"Monseigneur de la Trémouille."

"Then I am in time," thought the artist; "I must pursue him and make supplication."

Nevertheless he actually stood motionless where he was; oppressed by an inability, a paralysis of the will, that would have hindered the stirring of a finger had his very life been in danger. Repugnance, shame, seized him at the thought of pushing his way through the crowd that he might, like Fra Luca Pacioli, run after and pull at the skirts of a person of quality. The Gascon shot his arrow; it whizzed through the air, hit the mark, and penetrated deeply into the mole on Francesco's cheek.

"*Bigorre! Bigorre! Montjoie! Saint Denis!*" shouted the soldiers, throwing their caps into the air, "*Vive la France!*" The noisy crowd again encircled the *Colossus*, the jargon of many tongues broke forth anew; a fresh match was

arranged, and again arrows whistled on the air and wounded the great Duke. Leonardo could not move. Inconceivable as it may seem, rooted to the spot as in some hideous dream, he wat hed the slow destruction of the work of the six best years of his life; of perhaps the greatest monument of the sculptor's art since the days of Phidias and Praxiteles. Under a hail of bullets, arrows, and even stones, the brittle clay was broken off in lumps or resolved into dust; the supports were laid bare. The *Colossus* had become an immense iron skeleton.

The sun streamed out from behind a bank of clouds. Nothing remained but the headless body of a man, the trunk of a horse, the fragment of a sceptre, and the inscription on the pedestal: "Behold a god!" Just then the commandant of the French troops, the old Marshal Gian Giacomo Trivulzio, rode up. He looked at the place of the *Colossus*, stopped in sheer astonishment, looked again, shading his eyes from the sun; then turned to his attendants and asked:

"In the name of God, what has taken place?"

"*Monseigneur*," replied a lieutenant, "Captain Cockburn gave permission to his crossbowmen——"

"The Sforza monument! the work of Leonardo da Vinci!—made a target for the archers of Gascony!" cried the marshal, and he rushed at the men, who, intent on their work of destruction, had not observed his displeasure; seized a French-

man by the collar and flung him to the ground, rating him soundly. In his fury the old general had become quite purple.

"*Monseigneur*," stammered the soldier, struggling to his knees, shaking with fright, "*Monseigneur*, we did not know! Captain Cockburn had said——"

"To hell with your Captain Cockburn! I 'll hang every man jack of you!"

He flourished his sword and would have wounded some one had not Leonardo caught his wrist with such force that the brazen sword-hilt was bent.

Trivulzio stared at the stranger in dire amazement while struggling to free himself.

"Who is this man?" he exclaimed indignantly, and the artist himself replied:

"Leonardo da Vinci."

"And how do you dare—" began the old marshal, still beside himself, but meeting the clear unfaltering gaze of the eyes fixed upon him he broke off. "Eh? you are Leonardo?" he said. "I pray you loose my arm—you have crushed the hilt."

"*Monseigneur*," said Leonardo, "I beseech you. —Pardon these poor fools!"

The marshal again stared in amazement; then smiled, and shook his head.

"A strange fellow! What? You entreat for them?"

"If Your Excellence hangs every mother's son

among them, what will it profit me? They knew not what they did."

The old man became thoughtful, then his face cleared, and his small intelligent eyes shone with good nature.

"Hark ye, Messer Leonardo! There is one thing passes me. How could you stand there stock-still, looking on? Why did not you complain to me? or to Monseigneur de la Trémouille? He must have passed by within an hour!"

Leonardo looked down and reddened. "I was not in time," he stammered. "I—I don't know Monsieur de la Trémouille."

"'T is a misfortune," said the old man; and surveying the ruin, he exclaimed with great vehemence, "I would have given a hundred of my best troopers for your *Colossus!*"

On his way home, Leonardo crossed the bridge just under Bramante's loggia, the scene of his last interview with the Duke. Pages and grooms were chasing the swans which were so dear to Il Moro; and the poor creatures, unable to escape from the moat, fluttered and screamed in agonies. The water was flecked with down and snowy feathers; here and there on its blackness floated a white blood-stained body. One newly-wounded bird stretched its graceful neck in the convulsions of death, uttering piercing cries and flapping its weakening wings, as if in a last vain effort for flight. Leonardo averted his eyes and hurried away.

V

Louis XII. made his entry into the Lombard capital punctually on the 6th of October. Great crowds assembled to see the procession; and the newly-mended angels of the Milanese Commune waved their gilded wings to the admiration of all.

Leonardo had not touched his flying-machine since the day of the destruction of the *Cavallo;* but Astro still laboured at it indefatigably, now and then looking reproachfully at the Master with his one eye, in which blazed fires of zeal and hope.

One morning Pacioli came running with a message from the King, summoning Messer Leonardo to the castle. The artist was unwilling to leave Astro, for he had not confessed that the new apparatus was a failure, and he feared lest the enthusiast should endanger his neck in some rash experiment. However, he set forth, and presently arrived at the Sala della Rocchetta where Louis XII. was receiving the magistrates and chief citizens of the city.

Leonardo looked at his new sovereign with attention, but discovered nothing regal in his aspect. He was lean and feeble, with narrow shoulders, a hollow chest, and a face curiously wrinkled. Evidently used to suffering, it had conferred on him neither nobility nor grace; his virtues were at best of the *bourgeois* type.

A young man, twenty years of age, dressed simply in black, stood on the first step of the throne.

He wore no ornaments except a few pearls in the looping of his hat, and the gold chain of the Order of St. Michael; his face was pale, his flaxen hair was worn long, and he had dark blue eyes, soft, but singularly penetrating and observant.

"Tell me, Fra Luca," whispered Leonardo, "who is that young noble?"

"Cæsar Borgia, the son of the Pope, the Duke of Valentinois," replied the monk.

Leonardo was not ignorant of the crimes imputed to this young man. There was little doubt that he had murdered his brother in order that, exchanging the cardinal's purple for the title of *Gran Gonfaloniere* of the Roman Church, he might himself have the chief place in the family honours. Further, the whisper ran, that the motive of the fratricide was not ambition only, but a monstrous rivalry between the brothers for the favour of their sister Lucrezia.

"That at least is impossible," thought Leonardo, looking at the calm face and clear soft eyes,

Cæsar probably felt Leonardo's scrutinising gaze, for he turned and asked his secretary some question, pointing at the artist as he spoke. The secretary, a man of venerable aspect, replied in a whisper, and Cæsar in his turn looked intently at Leonardo, while a subtle smile played upon his lips.

"Nay, it is not impossible," thought the artist, answering his own hasty judgment; "anything is possible to that face; perhaps even worse than we have heard."

Cæsar Borgia (Giorgione).

Photo by Alinari.

The spokesman of the town syndics, having finished the reading of a long and tedious document, approached the throne and presented the parchment to the King. Louis accidentally dropped it, and before the citizen could pick it up, Cæsar had stooped dexterously and quickly, had lifted the roll, and placed it in the King's hand.

"He never loses an opportunity," grumbled some one standing near Leonardo.

"You are right," responded another; "the Pope's son understands the arts of service. You should see him of a morning at the King's dressing! He warms his shirt for him! I daresay he 'd be ready even to wash out the stable."

Leonardo also had observed Cæsar's too obsequious action, which seemed to him terrible rather than servile, like the caress of a wild beast; but he was no longer permitted to play the part of a spectator, for Pacioli dragged him forward and presented him to the King with a short speech made up of superlatives—"*stupendissimo! prestantissimo! invincibilissimo!*" and the like. Louis spoke at once of the *Cenacolo*, praising the figures of the Apostles, and waxing enthusiastic over the perspective of the roof. Fra Luca was quite sure His Majesty had a post ready to offer to the great artist; but unluckily at this moment a page brought in letters from France, and the King's attention was engrossed by the news that his loved wife, Anne of Brittany, had been delivered of a princess. The courtiers crowded round with their congratulations,

and Leonardo and Pacioli were pushed into the background. Pacioli would again have dragged his friend forward, but Leonardo objected, and presently left the palace.

On the drawbridge he was overtaken by Messer Agapito, Borgia's secretary, who by command of his master offered him the post of "*Ingegner ducale*" (chief engineer), which he had already filled under Il Moro.

Leonardo said he would reply after a few days' reflection, and went on towards his house.

Presently he saw a crowd of people, and hurried his steps with a presentiment of disaster. The fear was well grounded: his pupils, Giovanni, Marco, Salaino, and Cesare, unable to procure a litter, were carrying the unfortunate Astro on the broken wing of the new and ill-fated flying-machine, his garments bloodstained and torn, his face white as death. Leonardo guessed at once what had occurred. The smith, great in resolution and in faith, had ventured on the machine. He had fitted the apparatus to his shoulders, and leaped into the air. Then he had fallen, and would probably have been killed had not one of the wings caught in the boughs of a tree. Leonardo helped to carry the poor wretch home; with his own hands he laid him on a bed and bent over him to examine his hurts. Astro recovered from his swoon, and looking up with supplicating eyes, murmured:

"O Master! Forgive!"

VI

Louis XII. celebrated the birth of his daughter with great feasts, and a solemn thanksgiving mass was performed in the cathedral. The city was quiet, and all seemed peaceful and prosperous. Having exacted an oath of fealty from his new subjects, he appointed Marshal Trivulzio his viceroy, and returned to France early in November.

The calm was, however, deceitful; Trivulzio soon made himself detested by his cruelty and greed; the adherents of the banished Ludovico took heart and inflamed the people by liberal distribution of seditious letters. Soon those who had sent Il Moro forth with objurgations and jeers, proclaimed him the best and wisest of sovereigns.

Towards the end of January a crowd wrecked the offices of the tax-collector beside the Porta Ticinese; next day there was rioting near Pavia. The cause of the latter disturbance was an attempt made by a French soldier on the chastity of a peasant girl, who struck her assailant with a broom handle and was then threatened by him with an axe. She screamed; her father ran up with a cudgel and was killed by the soldier. Then the crowd fell upon the soldier and he was killed; after which the French drew on the populace and sacked the village.

When the news of this outrage reached Milan it acted like a spark upon gunpowder. The people poured into the squares, the streets, the market-

places, shouting: "Down with the King! Down with Trivulzio! Death to the foreigners! *Viva Il Moro!*"

The French troops were too few to withstand attack from the three hundred thousand inhabitants of Milan. Trivulzio placed guns upon the tower which for the present was in use as the cathedral belfry, but before giving the order to fire on the crowd he tried one more effort at pacification. He was hustled, hunted into the Palazzo del Comune, and would have perished there but for the timely intervention of the Swiss mercenaries. Then ensued burning and pillaging; torture and murder of all foreigners and their sympathisers who fell into the hands of the citizens. On the 1st of February Trivulzio fled, leaving the fortress in charge of the Captains d'Espe and Codecara. That very night Il Moro returned from Germany, and was received with great joy by the town of Como; all Milan anxiously awaited him as its saviour.

In these last days of the revolt, when the streets were being wrecked on all sides by the cannonade, Leonardo transferred his household to the ample cellars of his house, contriving living-rooms of tolerable comfort, and storing everything of value: pictures, drawings, manuscripts, scientific instruments.

He had definitely resolved to enter Cæsar Borgia's service, and was to present himself in Romagna not later than the summer of 1500; meanwhile he

proposed to visit his friend, Girolamo Melzi, at his villa of Vaprio in the vicinity of Milan, living there in retirement till the disturbances were at an end. On the morning of February the 2d, the Feast of the Purification, Fra Luca brought him the tidings that the castle had been flooded. A Milanese, Luigi da Porto, who had been in Trivulzio's service, had deserted to the rebels, first opening all the sluices which fed the moats of the fortress. The water spread over the circumjacent lands, reaching to the walls of the Rocchetta; and, making its way into the magazine and provision stores, almost forced the French to surrender, which was precisely what Messer Luigi had hoped. The flood had also overflowed the canal, had inundated the low-lying suburb of Porta Vercellina, where was situated the Monastery delle Grazie. Fra Luca expressed grave fears for Leonardo's *Cenacolo* and offered to go with him and see how it fared.

The painter, feigning indifference, replied that he was too busy, and that he believed the height of the fresco would preserve it from injury. No sooner, however, was he rid of Pacioli than he hastened to the convent refectory, on the brick floor of which pools were still left, and where there was a pervading odour of miasma and stagnant water. A monk told him that the flood had risen to the fourth of a cubit.

The *Cenacolo* had not been painted in water-colours, according to the usage for fresco; such

process requiring a rapidity of execution alien to Leonardo's genius.

"A painter who has no doubts will have small success," he used to say; and for his doubts, his vacillations, his experiments, corrections, and extreme slowness, only the medium of oil was suitable. It was in vain that experienced masters told him that oil paints were impossible for a damp wall standing on the verge of a marsh. His love of experiment and of new paths and devices induced him to disregard all warnings; he mixed his paints in a special way, and prepared the wall by coating it first with clay, varnished and oiled, then with a mixture of mastic, pitch, and plaster.

Having dismissed the monk, Leonardo crossed the still soaking refectory floor, and stepped close to examine his picture. The transparent and delicate colours seemed uninjured, and not even blurred; however he took a magnifying-glass and explored the surface in every part. To his dismay, there in the left-hand corner, just where the tablecloth was represented hanging in ample folds by the feet of St. Bartholomew, he discovered a small crack; beside it the colours were already fading, and on the surface was a white velvety patch, scarce observable, but the beginning of mould. Sudden paleness overspread Leonardo's features; he composed himself, however, and continued his examination with minute care. Very soon he realised what had happened. The first coating of varnished clay had bulged in consequence of the damp and

had come away from the wall, raising the upper coating of plaster which carried the paint; and in the plaster tiny almost invisible cracks had formed, through which a salt sweat exuded from the porous brickwork. The *Cenacolo* was doomed. The colours might last forty or fifty years and Leonardo himself never see their decay, but it was impossible to doubt that this his greatest work must irretrievably perish. He stood looking at the face of his Christ; realising for the first time how dear to him was this, his supreme creation.

The ruin of the *Cenacolo*, the destruction of the *Cavallo*, snapped the last threads which bound him to men, which united him to friends perhaps still unborn. His soul had long been solitary; now his solitude was deeper than before. The clay of the *Colossus*, resolved into dust, was the sport of the winds of heaven; mould was gathering on the very countenance of the Lord, dimming its outline, blurring and fading its colours. All that had been his very life was vanishing as a shadow.

He came away, leaving the monastery without speaking to any one; made his way to his deserted house, and descended to the place of refuge underground. He passed through the room where lay the unfortunate Astro, and stopped for a moment to speak to Giovanni, who was preparing a compress for the sick man's brow.

"Fever again?" asked the Master.

"Yes; he is delirious."

Leonardo watched the bandaging and listened

for a few minutes to the rapid disconnected babble which came from the lips of the poor broken enthusiast.

"Higher! Higher! Straight to the sun—so long as the wings don't catch fire! Ha! little one! Who are you? What is your name? Mechanics? That is a scurvy name! I never heard of a devil named Mechanics! What are you jeering at? Is it a joke? That 's enough now; you have had your joke, and I 've done with you. Ah!—Lift me! Lift me! I can bear no more! Let me just get my breath. Oh—death and damnation!" His face was anguished; cries of terror burst from his lips; he fancied himself falling into the abyss. But this passed and the rapid babbling recommenced.

"No, no! mock not! The fault was mine own. He told me they were not ready. Ay, he said so. I have betrayed the Master! I have betrayed the Master! Hush! Hush! O yes, I know him! the smallest and the heaviest of all the devils—the little one named Mechanics!"

Leonardo, leaning over the bed, could not avert his gaze. He was thinking:

"Here is another man whom I have destroyed."

He laid his hand on Astro's burning forehead. It appeared to calm him, little by little he became quieter, and presently he sank into a heavy sleep. Leonardo retired to his underground cell, and buried himself in his calculations. He was now studying the laws of the wind, and the aërial cur-

rents, and comparing them with the laws of the waves and currents of the sea—all still with reference to this question of flight.

"If you throw two stones of equal size into a pool at a little distance from each other," he said slowly to himself, "two widening circles will be formed on the surface of the water. Then will come a moment in which the first circle will meet the second; will it enter and bisect it? or will the waves be refracted at their point of contact? I answer, taking my stand on experience: the two circles will intersect each other, remaining, however, distinct and keeping their respective centres at the points where the stones fell."

The simplicity with which nature had solved this mechanical problem filled him with enthusiasm: "How subtle is this! How beautiful!"

He made a calculation, and the result added to his conviction that the mathematical sciences, with their laws founded on the essential necessities of reason, justified the natural necessities of mechanics.

Hour after hour flew by unnoticed, and evening came on. After supper, and relaxation in talk with his pupils, he again set to work. The acumen and lucidity of his thoughts convinced him that he was on the verge of some great discovery.

"Behold how the wind, blowing across the fields, drives waves over the rye, one succeeding the other, while the stalks, though they bend, remain fixed in the ground! In like manner do the waves

run over the immovable water. The ripple caused by the throwing of a stone, or by the force of the wind, should rather be called a shiver than a movement of the water. And of this you may persuade yourself by throwing a straw into the widening rings of wavelets, and watching how it rises and falls, but does not leave its place."

This experiment with the straw reminded him of a similar test which he had applied when studying the waves of sound. He mused:

"The striking of a bell will induce a slight quiver and a low resonance in a neighbouring bell; a note sounded on a lute will awake the same note in a lute by its side; and a straw laid upon the string which produces that note will show its vibration."

The soul of the student was greatly stirred; he divined some connection, a whole world of undiscovered knowledge, between the two oscillating straws; the one trembling on the surface of the waves, the other quivering on the vibrating string. And an idea, swift as lightning, flashed across his mind.

"The mechanical law is the same in the two cases! Like the waves on the water when a stone drops into it, so the waves of sound widen in the air, intersecting others, but not mingling with them, keeping their own centre in the place of their origin. What, then, of light? As an echo is the reproduction of a sound, the reflection in a mirror is an echo of light. There is but one mechanical law in all the phenomena of physical force; there is

but one will; and this will is Thy justice, O Prime Mover! the angle of incidence must be equal to the angle of reflection."

His face pale, his eyes burning with enthusiasm, Leonardo felt that once again, and this time more certainly than before, he was about to sound an abyss into which no man had looked before. He knew that this discovery, if confirmed by experiment, was the greatest mechanical discovery since the days of Archimedes. Two months ago, when he had heard that Vasco di Gama had doubled the Cape of Good Hope and discovered a new route to India, Leonardo had envied him, but now he had made a greater discovery than di Gama or Columbus; he had sighted more mysterious expanses, and, no less than they, had found a new heaven and a new earth.

But through the wall there reached his ears the groans and the ravings of the sufferer. He listened, and remembered his mechanics, the senseless destruction of the *Colossus*, the inevitable ruin of the *Cenacolo*, Astro's foolish and horrible fall; and asked himself:

"Will this discovery be lost as completely, as ignominiously as all else which I have done? Will no man heed my voice? Shall I ever be solitary as now? here alone in the darkness, underground, as if buried alive? I who have dreamed of wings!" After a short pause, he added: "Be it so! Darkness, and silence, and oblivion, and none to know what I have done! *I* know it!"

And indomitable pride, a sense of inalienable victory and strength filled his soul, as if the wings to which he had aspired were already lifting him above the earth.

The subterranean chamber suddenly became too strait for him; he felt stifled, and the longing was irresistible to behold the sky and the open country. He left the house and walked swiftly towards the cathedral.

VIII

The night was moonlit, serene, and warm; from the conflagration sullen flames still glowed, and smoky spirals still rose into the sky.

The crowd increased as he drew nearer to the centre of the town. The blue rays of the moon, the scarlet glare of the torches, illuminated faces haggard with excitement, seamed with anxiety, and played on the white banner with the scarlet cross which had been used by the ancient Milanese Commune, on lantern-poles, arquebuses, pistols, clubs, halberts, scythes, pitchforks, stakes, all pressed into service against the foreigner. The people swarmed like ants, the tocsin pealed, the guns roared. From the fortress the French were firing down the street, and their boast was that they would not leave one stone upon another within the city walls. Louder than the bells, more piercing than the booming of the cannon, rose the incessant yell of the citizens: "Death to the

French! Death to the foreigners! Down with the King! *Viva Il Moro!*"

To Leonardo it gave the impression of a wild and hideous dream. Near the eastern gate, a drummer from Picardy, a boy of sixteen, was being hanged, Mascarello the goldsmith playing the part of executioner. Flinging the rope round the lad's neck, and tapping him lightly on the head, he cried with ribald solemnity:

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, we dub this servant of God, this Frenchman, Saltamacchia, Knight of the Hempen Necklace."

"Amen!" responded the crowd.

The little drummer, ill understanding his danger, half smiling, blinking his eyes like a child about to cry, shrank into himself, twisting his neck that he might ease the noose. Then suddenly, as if awaking from a lethargy, he turned his beautiful but white and trembling face to the crowd, and would have attempted entreaty. His voice was drowned by howls and derisive laughter, and he gave up the attempt, holding his peace with the forlorn air of a resigned and innocent victim, and kissing a little cross, the gift of his mother or sister, which he had worn on a blue ribbon round his neck. Then Marscarello swung him into the void, with the jeer: "Courage, Knight of the Necklace! Show us how you dance the French *gaillard!*"

And, 'mid the laughter of the crowd, the child's

body shuddered horribly, and was convulsed in the spasms of death, as if indeed it were dancing.

Leonardo walked on, and presently he saw a woman, dressed in rags, kneeling before a miserable half-ruined hovel, and stretching out thin bare arms to the passers-by.

"Help! Help! Help!" she cried incessantly.

Corbolo the shoemaker, running up, asked what ailed her.

"My baby! My baby! He was sleeping, so pretty in his little bed! He has fallen through the floor! Perhaps he is still alive! Oh, save him! Try and save him! *Help!*"

Just then a cannon-ball, rending the air with a shriek, struck the roof of the hovel. The beams cracked, dust rose in a column, the roof fell, the walls crumbled, and the woman was for ever silenced.

Again Leonardo moved on, and presently he reached the Palazzo del Comune. Here, in front of the Loggia degli Osii, an university student was haranguing the crowd, descanting on the ancient glory of the Milanese, and exhorting the people to annihilate all tyrants, and establish the reign of equality. His hearers, however, seemed hard of persuasion.

"Citizens!" he cried, brandishing the knife which on ordinary occasions served him for mending pens, slicing sausages, and cutting his sweetheart's name on the bark of trees, but which now he had christened "the Poniard of Nemesis," "Citi-

zens! the hour has come in which we must die for Liberty! We will wash our hands in the blood of the tyrants; in their breasts we will plunge this Poniard of Nemesis. *Viva la Repubblica!*"

"Folly!" cried voices from the audience. "We know the wine of your vintage! We know the liberty you would give us, you spy, traitor, dog of a Frenchman! To the devil with you and your republic! *Viva Il Moro!* Death to all enemies of the Duke!"

The orator continued to prate, enforcing his doctrine by instances from Cicero and Tacitus, but the mob overthrew his bench, knocked him down, and beat him, shouting:

"Here 's for your Liberty! Here 's for your Republic! Here 's for inflaming fools against their legitimate ruler!"

Leonardo stood for a minute in the Piazza dell' Arengo to admire the imposing pile of the cathedral —that marble forest of pinnacles and towers, fantastic in the double light, blue rays of the moon and crimson flare of torches. In front of the archbishop's palace the press was so great that there was scarce standing-room, and from the centre of the throng came groans and ferocious howls.

"What has happened?" asked the painter of an old workman, whose gentle, dignified face was blanched with horror.

"Who can understand? They themselves know neither what they want nor what they do. They are accusing Messer Jacopo Crotta of selling poi-

soned flour, and of being a French spy! *O Dio! Dio!* It is a lie! But they fall on the first man they meet, and listen to none! 'T is horrible, 't is most horrible! Lord Jesus, have mercy on us, wretched sinners!"

Just then Gorgoglio the glass-blower detached himself from the dense pack of human bodies, holding aloft a bloody human head stuck on a pole; and Farfannicchio, the madcap of the streets, danced round it, screaming and yelling:

"Down with the traitors! Down with the foreigners! Death to the devils of Frenchmen!"

"*A furore populi, libera nos, Domine!*" murmured the old workman, crossing himself.

From the castle came an incessant sound of trumpets, drums, explosions of cannon, crackling of guns, cries of soldiers. The monster bombard, called by the French *Margot la Folle*, and by the Germans *die tolle Grete*, was fired; the earth shook, it seemed that the whole town must crash into ruins. The bomb fell beyond the Borgonuovo, and set fire to a house; pillars of flame rose into the quiet moonlit sky, and the piazza was lit with a crimson glare. The people hurried hither and thither, jostling, pushing, trampling each other like black shadows, like living phantoms.

Leonardo stood watching the wild scene, noting every detail, his mind preoccupied. The fiery glow, the voices of the crowd, the pealing of the bells, the boom of the guns, all brought back his discovery. Imagination pictured the waves of

sound, the waves of light swelling tranquilly, circling outwards like the ripple on water where a stone has fallen, intersecting each other without mingling or confusion, each keeping its own centre in the point of its origin. Great gladness filled his soul as he thought that never at any time could men interrupt the harmonious play of these ordered waves, nor the mechanical law which rules them, the unchanging fiat of their Creator, the rule of divine justice, making the angle of incidence equal to the angle of reflection.

In his soul re-echoed:

"O wondrous justice of Thee, Thou Prime Mover! No force hast Thou permitted to lack the order and the quality of its necessary effect!"

In the frenzied crowd, the soul of the artist preserved the eternal calm of contemplation; even as the blue rays of the moon shone with heavenly effulgence supreme over glare of torches and flames of conflagration and war.

On a certain morning in February, 1500, Ludovico Sforza, Il Moro, re-entered Milan by the Porta Nuova. Leonardo had started the previous night for Vaprio, his friend Melzi's villa.

IX

Girolamo Melzi had once belonged to the Court of the Sforzas, but on the death of his young wife in 1494 he had retired to his lonely villa at the foot of the Alps, a few hours' journey from Milan. Far

from the noise of the world, he lived the life of a philosopher, gardening with his own hands, and devoting himself to music and to the study of the occult sciences. Some said he was an adept in black magic, accustomed to call up the shade of his lost wife from the lower world. The mathematician, Fra Luca Pacioli, and Sacrobosco, the alchemist, often visited him, and whole nights were spent in argument about Plato's ideas, and the laws of the Pythagorean numbers which governed the music of the spheres. But Melzi found his chief pleasure in the visits of Leonardo, which were not infrequent, as the works on the Martesana Canal often brought him to the vicinity.

Vaprio was situated on the left bank of the Adda; and the canal, skirting the villa garden, ran for a certain distance parallel to the river, the course of which was just here obstructed by rapids. All day the roar of the cataract made itself heard, loud as the billows of the sea surf. Free, wild, storm-tossed, untamed by man, the Adda hurled its green waves between winding precipitous banks of yellow sandstone. By its side, the same cold, green, mountain water swam noiselessly by within the straight-drawn confines of the canal; smooth as a mirror, calm, slow, submissive, and subdued. The contrast delighted Leonardo, and seemed to him of pregnant meaning. Which of the two streams was the more beautiful—the Martesana, his own creation, the work of human intelligence and will, or its elder sister, the foaming Adda, savage,

threatening, superb in its untrammelled freedom? He understood each, sympathised with each, and loved them with equal love.

From the upper terrace of the villa garden was a wide prospect of the immense Lombard plain, one vast and smiling garden. In the summer the fields were rank with verdure; hay scented the air; the wheat and the maize grew so tall as to overtop the vines; ears of corn kissed the pears and the apples, the cherries and the plums. The hills of Como rose dark towards the north; above them towered the first spurs of the Alps; higher still the snow-clad summits glowed in the sunset gold.

Fra Luca and Messer Galeotto Sacrobosco, whose cottage by the Porta Vercellina had been destroyed by the French, were both at the villa when Leonardo arrived; but he kept himself apart, preferring solitude. He conceived, however, a great fondness for the company of Francesco, his host's little son.

Timid and shy as a girl, the boy at first stood in great awe of the painter; one day, however, he came into his room at a moment when Leonardo, studying the laws of colour, was experimenting with coloured glass. He pleased the child by letting him look through the different pieces, yellow, blue, purple, or green, which gave a fairy aspect to familiar objects, and made the world seem now smiling, now frowning, according to the colour of the glass. Another of Leonardo's inventions proved very attractive. This was the "Camera

obscura," by means of which living pictures appeared on a sheet of white paper; and Francesco saw the turning of the mill-wheel, the swallows circling round the church, the woodcutter's grey donkey with his load of faggots stepping daintily along the miry road while the poplars bowed their heads under the breeze. Still more fascinating was the weather-gauge: a copper ring, a small stick like the beam of a balance, and two little balls, the one covered with wax, the other with wadding. When the air was saturated with moisture the wadding grew heavy, and the little ball, falling down, inclined the beam till it touched one or other of the divisions marked on the copper ring. The degree of damp could thus be accurately measured, and the weather predicted for two or three days. The little boy constructed a similar apparatus for himself and was jubilant when the prophecies were fulfilled which he had deduced from its variations. Francesco went to the village school where he was taught by the old prior of the neighbour convent. The dog-eared Latin grammar and arithmetic primer were odious to him, and he learned but slackly. Leonardo's lore was of a new sort, pleasant to the child as a fairy tale. The instruments for the study of optics, acoustics, hydraulics, were to him new and magical toys, nor was he ever tired of hearing the painter's talk. Fearing ridicule or suspicion, Leonardo spoke but cautiously with adults; to Francesco he talked with the utmost frankness and simplicity. He not only taught the

child, but learned of him. Paraphrasing the text of Holy Writ, he told himself—"Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of knowledge."

It is at this time that he was writing his *Book of the Stars*. On March evenings, when in the still chilly air there was a waft of spring, he would stand on the roof with Francesco, watching the tide of stars and sketching the spots on the face of the moon. Then rolling a piece of paper into an inverted cone, he bade the child look through the aperture at the end, and Francesco saw the stars robbed of their rays, and like bright, round, infinitely minute gobules.

"Those globules," said Leonardo, "are of great size, many of them a hundred, nay a thousand times larger than our earth, which, however, is not less beautiful nor more contemptible than they. The mechanical laws which obtain in our world, and which have been discovered by human sagacity, guide also those stars and suns."

"What is there beyond the stars?" murmured the child.

"More stars, Francesco; worlds which we cannot see."

"And beyond those?'

"Yet others."

"But at the end, at the very end?"

"There is no end."

"No end!" cried the boy, and Leonardo felt

the trembling of the little hand within his own. The child's face had grown pale.

"Then where—where," he said slowly. "where is Paradise, Messer Leonardo, and the angels, and the saints, and the Madonna, and God the Father who sits upon the throne with God the Son and the Holy Spirit?"

The teacher would have liked to answer that God was everywhere; in the grain of sand no less than in the celestial globe; in the hearts of men no less than in the outside universe. But fearing to disturb the simple faith of the little one he held his peace.

X

With the first budding of the trees, the painter and the child spent whole days together in the garden or in the neighbouring woods watching the reviving of life in the vegetable world. Sometimes Leonardo would draw a flower or tree, trying to seize the living likeness as in the portrait of a man; that unique particular aspect of his model which would never be repeated. He taught Francesco how the rings seen in the wood of the trunk reveal the age of the tree; and how the thickness of each ring shows the amount of moisture in the year when it was formed; how the core of the trunk is always on the southern side, which has had the most of the sun's heat. He told how in the spring-time the sap, gathering between the inner green of the trunk and the outer bark, thickens and expands and bursts the bark; how, if a branch is cut, the vital

power draws an abundance of nutritive juices to the wounded place, so that the bark thickens and the wound is healed; yet its mark remains, because the abundance of the nutritive juices has been too great and has overflowed and made lumps and knots. Always he spoke of nature dryly and with apparent frigidity, seeking only scientific accuracy. With passionless exactitude he defined the tender details of the action of the spring upon the life of plants, as he would have spoken of the performance of a machine. He showed from abstract mathematics the wonderful laws which shape the needles of pine-trees and the facets of crystals. Yet for all his coldness and impartiality, the child discerned his love for all living things, for the withered leaf no less than for the mighty boughs which spread suppliant arms to their great lord, the sun. At times, in the depth of the forest, he would pause and note smilingly how under last year's withered leaves, still hanging on the branches, green shoots were sprouting to oust them from their place; how the bee, weak from her winter torpor, could scarce crawl into the snowdrop's cup. In the great stillness Francesco could hear the beating of his friend's iron heart; timidly he would raise his eyes to the Master. The sun shining athwart the branches lit up his long curling hair, flowing beard, and overhanging brows, and surrounded his head with a halo; he seemed like Pan himself who listens to the growing of the grass, the murmuring of spring below the earth, the mys-

tical forces of awakening life. To Leonardo all things lived. The world was one great body, like the body of man, who himself is a little world. In the dewdrops he saw the similitude of the watery sphere which surrounds the earth. The cataracts of the Adda near Trezzo gave him occasion to study the cascades and whirlpools of rivers which he compared to the twisting of a woman's curls. Mysterious resemblances attracted him, concords in nature's harmony like voices answering each other from distant worlds. Inquiring into the origin of the rainbow, he noted that the same prismatic colour is seen in the plumage of birds, precious stones, in the scum on stagnant water, in old dulled glass. In the patterns on frosted window-panes, he found a resemblance to living leaves and flowers, as if nature in this world of frozen crystal had seen prophetic visions of the coming spring. At times he felt himself drawing near new realms of knowledge, perhaps to be entered only by men of ages to come. He used to say about the attractive powers of amber:

"I see not the mode by which the human mind shall apprehend the mystery. These powers of the magnet and the amber are among those occult forces which are as yet unrevealed."

And further:

"The world is full of countless possibilities of which yet there has been no experience."

One day, a certain Messer Guidotto Prestinari, a poet from Bergamo, came to the villa. Offended

with Leonardo, who did not sufficiently praise his verses, he began a discussion on the comparative excellence of poetry and painting. Leonardo spoke little, but the fury with which Messer Guidotto assailed his art at last amused him and he said, half jesting:

"Painting is higher than poetry, inasmuch as it reproduces the eternal works of God and not human inventions, to which the poets, at least of our day, are too apt to confine themselves. They depict not, but describe, borrowing all they have and trading with each other's wares. They but put together and combine the refuse of knowledge. They may be compared to the receivers of stolen goods. . . ."

Fra Luca, Messer Galeotto, and Melzi himself cried out; but Leonardo had now warmed to the subject and cried:

"The eye gives a more complete knowledge of nature than the ear! Things seen are less to be doubted than things heard. Painting, which is silent poetry, comes nearer to positive science than poetry, which is invisible painting. Words give but a series of isolated images following one another; but in a picture, all the forms, all the colours appear synchronously, and are blended into a whole, like the notes of a chord of music; and thus both to painting and to music a more complex harmony is possible than to poetry. And the richer the harmony, the richer is that delight which is the aim and the enchantment of art.

Question, say, any lover, whether he would not rather have a portrait of his loved one than a description in words of her countenance, though it were composed by the greatest of poets."

This argument provoked a smile, and presently Leonardo continued:

"Hear a narrative from my own experience. A certain Florentine youth fell into such a longing for the face of a woman whom I had painted in one of my sacred pictures, that, having bought it, he cancelled all the signs of its religious character, so that he might kiss his adored one without fear or scruple. But soon the voice of conscience overcame the passion of love, nor could he recover his tranquillity of mind till he had removed the picture from his dwelling. Think ye, O poets, that with your words you could rouse a man to like vehemence of desire? Believe me, Messeri, I speak not of myself, for I know how greatly I fall short, but of that painter who attains to the perfection of his art. He is no longer a man; rapt in the contemplation of divine and eternal beauty, or turned to the study of monstrous forms, grotesque, pathetic, terrible, he can comprehend and give shape to all; he is a sovereign—a god."

Many such ideas Leonardo had inscribed in his note-books; and Fra Luca urged him to order his manuscripts and give them to the public. He even offered to find him an editor. Leonardo, however, refused, and remained firm in his resolution that he would publish nothing. Yet all

his writings were couched in the form of address to a reader; and at the commencement of one of his diaries he apologised in these words for the disconnected style and frequent repetitions:

"Blame me not, O reader, for the subjects are numberless and my memory is weak, and I write at long intervals in different years."

XI

In the last days of March disquieting tidings reached the Villa Melzi. The French army, led by Monsieur de la Trémouille, had crossed the Alps and was descending for the reconquest of Milan. Il Moro, suspicious of all, and oppressed by superstitious fears, dared not meet the enemy in the open field, and daily showed himself "*più pauroso d'una donniccuola*" (more panic-stricken than a silly girl).

But at the villa news of the great world seemed but a faint and far off hum. Careless of Duke and King, Leonardo roamed the neighbouring hills and glens and woods, accompanied only by the little Francesco. Sometimes they ascended the river to its source among the pine-clad mountains; and there they hired workmen and made excavations, seeking fossil shells and plants.

One evening, wearied by a long day's march, they rested under an old lime-tree overhanging the steep bank of the Adda. The unbounded plain, with its long rows of wayside poplars, lay stretched

at their feet. The white houses of Bergamo shone in the evening sunlight; the snowy mountain-tops seemed to float in the air. All the sky was clear, save that in the far distance, almost on the horizon, between Treviglio, Brignano, and Castel Rozzone, there suddenly appeared a light cloud of smoke.

"What is it?" asked Francesco.

"I know not. It may be a battle. I see what may be fire, and think I hear the sound of cannon. It may be a skirmish between our folk and the French."

Latterly, such chance encounters had not been infrequent. They watched the cloud silently for a few minutes, then turned their attention to the fruit of their day's digging. The master picked up a large bone, sharp as a needle, the fin of some primeval fish.

"How many kings, how many nations has not time destroyed since this creature fell on its sleep in that great cavern, where to-day we have found it? How many thousands of years has the world seen, what changes have taken place, while it was lying hid, concealed from all eyes, supporting heavy masses of earth with its bare skeleton?"

He made a large gesture with his hand, as if to embrace the verdant plains stretched at their feet; then continued:

"All that you see, Francesco, was once the bed of an ocean which covered the chief parts of Europe Africa, and Asia; the summits of the Apennines

were islands in a great sea, and fishes swam in these fields of singing birds."

He interrupted himself, and they looked once more at the distant smoke-drift, and the flashes of fire from the cannon, so insignificant in the boundless expanse, which lay all peaceful and rose-tinted in the sunset glow. It was hard to believe that a fight was taking place, and that men were killing each other almost within range of their eyesight. More vivid to Francesco were the birds flying to roost, the fish of that forgotten sea. Neither spoke, but at that moment the painter and the child had the same thought:

"'T is a small matter whether the Lombards prevail or the Frenchmen; Ludovico the Duke, or Louis the foreign King; our own people or the strangers. Country, glory, war, the strife of policy, the fall of thrones, the upheaval of nations, all that to men seems great or terrible—all are no more than yonder little cloud of smoke, melting into the peaceful twilight, dissolving in the immutable serenity of Nature."

XII

It was at Vaprio that Leonardo finished a picture begun long ago at Florence. In a cavern, surrounded by great rocks, the Mother of God was folding one arm round the infant John the Baptist, with the other clasping her Son, as if she desired to unite the Human and the Divine in the indissoluble

embrace of a single love. John, devoutly joining his little hands, bent his knee before Jesus, who blessed him with two fingers raised. The attitude of the infant Saviour, sitting naked on the naked earth, one plump dimpled leg tucked under the other, while he leaned on a plump hand, all its fingers outspread upon the sand—suggested the baby still unable to walk; yet already on his face perfect wisdom was blent with the simplicity of infancy. A kneeling angel supporting the little Jesus, and pointing at the Precursor, turned to the spectator a face instinct with mournful foreboding, yet illumined by a strange and tender smile. Behind the rocks a pale sun shone through drizzling rain, and blue mountains rose into the sky, their sharp peaks weird and unearthly; the rocks, smoothed and polished as if by the action of salt water, suggested some dried-up ocean bed; and in the cavern was most profound shadow, almost concealing a bubbling spring, leaves of water-plants, pale dim cups of purple iris-flowers. One could fancy slow tricklings and droppings from the overhanging arch of black dolomite, and the creeping weeds and grasses were heavy with the continuous ooze of the ground and the damp saturation of the air. The face of the Madonna alone shone with the delicate brilliance of alabaster within which glows a light. Queen of Heaven, she was shown to men in the gloom of twilight, in a subterranean cavern, in the most secret of the recesses of nature, perhaps the last refuge of ancient Pan and the wood nymphs

The Madonna of the Rocks (Leonardo da Vinci, National Gallery).

Photo by Mansell.

—she, the mystery of mysteries, the mother of the God-man, in the very bosom of mother earth.

It was the creation at once of a great artist and of a great student; the play of light and of shadow, the laws of vegetable life, the anatomy of the human body, the science of drapery, the spirals of a woman's curls (which he had compared to the circling of a whirlpool), all that the natural philosopher had searched into with "unrelenting severity," had measured with mathematical accuracy, had dissected as one dissects a corpse—all this the artist had recombined into a new creation, living beauty, a silent melody; into a mystic hymn to the Holy Virgin, the Mother of God. With knowledge equalled by love he had depicted the veins in the iris petals, the dimples in the baby's elbow, the ancient cleft in the dolomite rock, the quiver of the water in the secret spring; the quiver of infinite grief in the angel's smile. He knew all and loved all. Great love is the daughter of great knowledge.

XIII

One day the alchemist, Messer Galeotto Sacrobosco, undertook to experiment with the "Rod of Mercury," under which name were known all those staves of myrtle, almond, tamarind, or other "astrological" woods, which were supposed to have a kinship with metals, and the property of discovering veins of gold, silver, and copper in the

rocks. Accompanied by Messer Gerolamo, he went to the east side of the lake of Lecco, known to be rich in ores; and Leonardo joined the company, though he had no faith in the "Rod of Mercury," and mocked at it no less than at the other delusions of the alchemists.

Near the village of Mandello, at the foot of Monte Campione, there was an abandoned iron mine. Some years before, the ground had fallen in and buried a number of the miners; and it was reported that sulphurous exhalations rose from a rent in the lowest depths of the mine, into which, if a stone were thrown, it fell, and fell, and fell, but was never heard to strike the bottom, for the sufficient reason that the pit was bottomless. Leonardo's curiosity was excited by these tales, and he determined to explore the mine while his companions were busied with the magic rod. Not without difficulty, for the peasants believed the mine to be the dwelling-place of a devil, he obtained the services of an old man as guide. A subterranean passage, very steep and dark, and with broken and slippery stairs, led to the central shaft. The guide walked stolidly in front with a lantern, and Leonardo followed, carrying Francesco who insisted on accompanying his friend. They descended more than two hundred steps, and were still going down, the passage becoming ever narrower and more steep. A stifling smell of subterranean damp assailed the nostrils. Leonardo struck the wall with a spade, listened to the sound

it made, and examined the piece of rock he had detached, the nature and layers of the soil, and the bright mica sparkling in the veins of granite.

He felt the child clinging to him very tightly, and he asked with a smile whether his little comrade were afraid.

"With you, I am never afraid," said Francesco; presently he added shyly, "Is it true what my *babbo* says, that you are going to leave us?"

"Yes, Francesco.'

"Where are you going?"

"To Romagna; to the Duke Valentino."

"Is it very far?"

"Several days' journey.'

"Several days!" sighed Francesco; "then shall we never see you again?"

"Why not? The first minute I can, I will come and see you."

The boy became thoughtful. Squeezing Leonardo's neck tightly with his two arms, he cried:

"Take me with you! Oh, Messer Leonardo, take me with you!"

"Alack, my child! How is it possible? There is war there."

"I don't care for the war. Have I not said that with you I am never afraid? Even if it be more fearsome than it is in this place where we are now, I shall not be afraid. I will be your servant, brush your clothes, carry hay to your horses; and I will seek shells for you, and make you drawings of leaves. Did you not say to me I drew them well?

I will do everything like a man. I will obey you in whatever you command. Take me with you, Messer Leonardo!"

"And how about Messer Gerolamo? Would he consent?"

"He will consent if I cry for it. And if he does n't consent, then I will run away. Say you will take me with you! Say it!"

"No, Francesco; it is idle talk. I know thou would'st not leave thy father. He grows old, and thou must have a fondness for him."

"Of a surety I have a fondness for him. But for you, too, Messer Leonardo! You think me very little, but truly I comprehend everything. Aunt Bona says you are a sorcerer, and Don Lorenzo, my schoolmaster, says likewise, and that you are wicked, and that with you I shall lose my soul. But when he speaks ill of you, I answer him in such wise that he comes near beating me!"

Suddenly Francesco's eyes filled and the corners of his lips drooped.

"I understand," he said; "I understand why you don't want me. You don't love me. And I—." He burst into tears.

"Hush! hush! Thou should'st cry shame to weep! Hearken to what I tell thee. In a few years, when thou art grown, then I will take thee for my disciple, and keep thee always at my side."

The child raised his eyes, tears still trembling on their long lashes.

"But do you mean it? or is it said to comfort me, and afterwards will you forget?"

"No, Francesco, I promise."

"You promise? And how long must I wait?"

"Eight or nine years: till thou art at the least fifteen."

"Eight years," sighed the child, reckoning on his fingers, "and I shall be always with you?"

"Unless we die."

"Eight years! Well, if you say it, it is certain."

Francesco smiled, and rubbed his cheek against Leonardo's with a pretty gesture peculiar to himself.

"Messer Leonardo, once I dreamed I was in the dark, going down a long, long stair like this one, only it had no beginning and no end. But I was not frightened, for some one was carrying me. I thought it was my mother, who died ere ever I saw her; but now I know it was you. I am as happy with you as if I were with her."

Leonardo looked at the child with inexpressible tenderness. The innocent eyes shone; he put out his bright lips as confidingly as to a mother, and when Leonardo kissed them he felt the child was giving him his soul. Thus, with the little heart beating against his own, he descended with firm steps into the subterranean night.

XIV

Upon their return to Vaprio they found alarm

in the villa; the French were approaching. Louis, furious at the revolt of the Milanese, had given their city over to pillage. Many of the inhabitants fled to the mountains. Along the road was an endless procession of carts laden with household stuff, and weeping women dragging children by the hands. At night, from the top windows of the villa, flames were seen still citywards. At Novara a battle was daily expected which should decide the fate of Lombardy.

At last Fra Luca brought news of the sad event which had ended the war. The battle was ordered on the 10th of April, but when the Duke was reviewing his forces, prior to its commencement, the Swiss mercenaries refused to advance, for they had been secretly bought by Trivulzio. In vain Il Moro conjured them with tears not to bring him to ruin, and promised them extravagant reward in recompense of fidelity. They remained obdurate.

Then Ludovico, disguised as a monk, sought to flee; but a Swiss named Schattenhalb betrayed him to the French captains. He was seized and carried before the marshal, who rewarded the Swiss with thirty pieces of silver.

The Sire de la Trémouille had charge of the prisoner to escort him to France. He, who, in the words of the Court poet, "first after God had guided the wheel of Fortune," was placed in a barred cage and carried in a cart, like a trapped wild beast. The Duke asked one favour of his

captors, that he might carry a copy of the *Divina Commedia* with him into his exile, "*per istudiari.*"

Life at the Villa Melzi became daily more perilous. The French had sacked Lomellina. The Venetians had destroyed the Martesana. Robbers roamed in the neighbourhood of Vaprio; already Messer Gerolamo Melzi was preparing to carry Francesco and Aunt Bona into refuge at Chiavenna.

Leonardo's last night came; he inscribed in his diary the thoughts of the day:

"A bird having little tail but broad wings, flaps them with great violence, and turns *so that the wind may blow under them* and raise her *aloft.* This I observed watching a young hawk above the canonry of Vaprio, on the road to Bergamo, to-day, April 14th."

And in the margin he added incidentally: "Il Moro has lost his state, his goods, and his liberty; not one of his undertakings will be achieved by himself."

The overthrow of the great House of Sforza, the ruin of the man he had served for sixteen years, were to him of far less interest than the flight of a bird of prey.

BOOK XI

THERE SHALL BE WINGS—1500

"Piglierà il primo volo il grande ucello sopra del dosso del suo magno Cecero, empiendo l'universo del stupore, empiendo di sua fama tutte le scritture, e gloria eterna al nido dove nacque."

LEONARDO DA VINCI.

(The human bird shall take his first flight, filling the world with amazement, all writings with his fame, and bringing eternal glory to the nest whence be sprang.)

I

THE little town of Vinci, Leonardo's native place, lay on the western slope of Monte Albano, in Tuscany, between Florence and Pisa, and not far from Empoli. There he had an uncle, Ser Francesco da Vinci, who had amassed wealth in the silk industry, and who, unlike the rest of the family, was friendly to his nephew. Before journeying to Romagna the painter proposed to visit Ser Francesco, and if possible to leave Astro in his charge, the unfortunate smith not yet having recovered from the effects of his fall. Leonardo hoped that the mountain air, with quiet and rest, might accomplish more than the drugs and experimental surgery of ignorant physicians. The

artist, who had been in Florence for a few days, journeyed to Vinci alone, riding a mule. He left the town by the Porta a Prato and took his way along the banks of the Arno; at Empoli he left the high road and followed a narrow and winding mountain path. The day had been clouded and cool; at evening the sun set in a bank of mist which foreboded a north wind. The prospect on either side continually widened; the hills became higher; and though their undulations were still gentle, they gave promise of higher mountains behind. The ground was carpeted with scanty herbage of a dull green; and the fields, with fallow stripes of brown earth, the stone walls, the grey olives, were all dull and whitish in tone, suggestive of the calm, the simplicity, the poverty of the north. Here and there in the distance, beside some solitary chapel or farmhouse with yellow walls and barred windows, dark pointed cypresses, such as may be seen in the pictures by early Florentine masters, rose against quiet hills and an even background of clear, delicately gradated sky.

The path became gradually steeper, the air fresher and more invigorating. Sant' Ausano, Calistri, Lucardi, and the Chapel of San Giovanni were already past. Now the day closed, and one by one the stars came out in the blue sky, from which the clouds had disappeared. The wind freshened; the *tramontana*, that piercing wind from the Alps, was beginning to blow. Every appearance of the lowlands had vanished; as the plain had passed

into hills, so now the hills passed into mountains. Quite suddenly, at a turn of the road, Vinci came in sight, a little, crowded, stone-built town, clustering round the black tower of its ancient castle, clinging to the rock, crowning the peaked summit of a low but sharply precipitous hill. Lights were gleaming in the windows of the houses.

At the cross-roads near the foot of the hill there was a little shrine known to Leonardo from his earliest childhood; a clay image of the Virgin glazed in blue and white, before which a lamp burned continually. As he passed he saw a woman kneeling, bowed together dejectedly, covering her face with her hands, a poor peasant woman, in a thin dark dress, torn and weather-stained.

"Caterina!" murmured Leonardo. It was his mother's name; she too had prayed here, a poor peasant.

After crossing the swift mountain stream, the path turned to the right between garden walls overgrown with weeds. Here it was quite dark, and the traveller did not see the rose-branch which kissed his face as he passed, and scented the air with balm. He dismounted at an ancient wooden door let into the wall, and knocked with a stone on the iron cramp. It was the house which had belonged to Leonardo's grandfather, and from him had passed to Ser Francesco. The painter himself had spent his childhood within its walls. No one answered the knock, nor was there for a long time any sound but the rushing of the mill-stream, and

presently the quavering bark of an old watch-dog.

An old man came out, very much bowed and wrinkled, with silvery hair. He carried a lantern, and was very deaf and rather stupid, so that it took him time to understand who Leonardo was.

However, when at last he recognised him whom he had carried in his arms forty years earlier, he burst into tears of joy, dropped his lantern, and, stooping over the painter's hand, mumbled it with his lips, sobbing out:

"*O Signore! Signore! Leonardo mio!*"—while the dog wagged his tail to please the old gardener, pretending that he clearly comprehended what was taking place. Gian Battista, the old man, explained that Ser Francesco was away at Marcigliano, where a monk of his acquaintance had promised a drug to cure him of the stomach-ache; he would not be home for two days. Leonardo determined, however, to wait for him; more especially because next day Baltraffio was to bring up Zoroastro from Florence.

The old man ushered the visitor into the house, and bade his granddaughter, a pretty fair-haired girl of sixteen, to prepare supper. Leonardo declined anything but bread, home-grown wine, and iron-water from the spring on the property. Ser Francesco, though well-to-do, continued the hardy, simple style of living which had been a necessity to his forefathers, and his house was anything but luxurious.

Leonardo entered the familiar apartment, at once kitchen and parlour, where the few clumsy chairs, settles, and chests had become smooth and polished with age; a dresser carried heavy pewter dinner-plates, and medicinal herbs were hanging from the beams of the raftered ceiling. The walls were whitewashed, and quite bare; there was a brick floor, and an immense fireplace begrimed with soot.

All this was as Leonardo remembered it, but there was one innovation: thick dull green glass had been inserted in the window-panes, formerly covered only with oiled cloth, causing twilight in the room on the brightest day. Upstairs, in the sleeping rooms, the windows were protected by wooden shutters, which did not fit close enough to keep out the cold.

The gardener made a fire of fragrant juniper and mountain heather, and lit a hanging earthenware lamp, in shape much like the lamps found in Etruscan tombs. In this remote corner of Tuscany the furniture, the customs, even the language had preserved traces of immemorial antiquity. While the young girl was preparing the supper of wine, bread, and a lettuce salad, Leonardo mounted to the upper rooms, where little had been changed since his last visit. He saw the same immense four-poster bed, in which his grandmother had sometimes permitted him to sleep, and which had now passed, with the other heirlooms, to his Uncle Francesco. On the wall hung the well-remembered crucifix, the image

of the Madonna, the shell for holy water, a bunch of dried grass, called *nebbia*, and a book of Latin prayers in cursive script, written on paper deeply yellowed by time.

Returning to the parlour, he sat in the chimney-corner, drank from a wooden cup with a pleasant scent of olive-wood, and remaining in the room alone, after Gian and his granddaughter had gone to bed, abandoned himself to happy recollections.

II

He thought of his father, Ser Pietro da Vinci, the notary of the Florentine Commune, a man of seventy, white-haired, but still vigorous, whom he had seen a few days ago at Florence, in his house in the Via Ghibellina. No one had ever loved life better than Ser Pietro, with a love simple and unabashed. He had cherished a great tenderness for his first-born, but his legitimate sons, Antonio and Giuliano, fearing lest their father should alienate part of his patrimony in favour of the bastard, had done all in their power to induce bad blood between them.

Leonardo now felt himself a stranger in his father's house. His youngest half-brother, Antonio, was more especially prejudiced against him on account of his supposed atheism, for Antonio was one of the Piagnoni, a zealous and rigid follower of Savonarola, and also a conventional, virtuous, and money-loving trader of the guild of the wool-staplers. Antonio often addressed his

half-brother on the subject of the Christian faith, the need for repentance, the heresies of the philosophical thinkers of the day, and he had given him a book compiled by himself, a *Manual of the Art of Saving the Soul*. Leonardo carried this book in his pocket, and now, seated in his uncle's chimney-corner, he drew it forth. It was a little volume, written in the small laborious hand which befitted a merchant's office.

"The book of confession compiled by me, Antonio di Ser Pietro da Vinci, a Florentine, sent to Nanna, my sister-in-law; most useful to all who desire to confess their sins."

For Leonardo, his brother's book breathed the air of conventional and bourgeois piety, which had weighed upon his childhood, and had been an inheritance in his family. A century before his birth the founders of the House of Vinci were just as prudent, just as avaricious, just as pious servants of the Florentine Commune as was now Ser Pietro, his father. Their name appeared first in a writing of 1339, where mention was made of one Michele da Vinci, a notary. Leonardo imagined him like Antonio, his well-remembered grandfather. Antonio instructed his sons to aspire to nothing over high, not to fame, nor to honours, nor to public office, civil or military, nor to exceptional wealth, nor to exceptional learning.

"*Starsi mezzanamente è cosa più sicura*," "'T is safest to keep the mean," was his constant saw; and Leonardo remembered the gravity and calm

assurance with which he enunciated this infallible rule.

After thirty years' absence, sitting under the roof of his grandfather's house, listening to the moaning wind and watching the logs burning in the fireplace, Leonardo thought how his own life had been one long breach of this "ant and spider" policy; had been an exuberant blossoming which, according to his brother Antonio, temperance should have measured with compasses and shorn away with iron shears.

III

Next morning, before the old gardener was awake, Leonardo left the house, and having traversed the poor little town of Vinci ascended to Anchiano, the neighbouring hamlet. The path was steep, and, as on the previous day, the sun colourless and wintry. At the verge of the horizon, the cold cloudless blue of the sky melted into a dull purple. The *tramontana* blew steadily from the north, whistling monotonously in the ears. The vegetation was still colourless and poor; little meagre vineyards in semicircles, sparse dull grasses, mingled with fluttering poppies; on all sides dusty grey olives, with knotted, blackened, and twisted trunks of great antiquity. Entering Anchiano, Leonardo halted, for he did not recognise the place. Where had been the Castello degli Adimari with a wine-shop in its only unruined tower, there were now a

vineyard and a new house, with smoothly white-washed walls. A husbandman digging trenches among the vines explained that mine host of the tavern having died, the land had been sold to a sheep-breeder from Orbignano, who had cleared away the ruins, and made a vineyard and an olive-grove on their site.

Leonardo had good reason to ask after that little tavern, for it was there he had been born.

Fifty years earlier, the village wine-shop had been lively enough. It stood a little back from the road, its sign-board swinging merrily. The inhabitants of the surrounding hamlets on their way to the fairs of San Miniato or Fucecchio, chamois-hunters, mule-drivers, custom-house officers, and other persons who were not too exclusive in their taste for company—all met here. The maid of the tavern was a girl of sixteen, an orphan, a *contadina* from Vinci; her name Caterina.

One day, in the spring-time of 1451, Pietro di Ser Antonio da Vinci, a young notary from Florence, was called to Anchiano to draw up an agreement for the lease of the sixth part of a certain oil-press. Business concluded, the peasants invited the notary to drink at the tavern in the old tower of the Adimari. Ser Pietro, always affable, even among simple folk, accepted the invitation. The party was served by Caterina, and the young notary, as he afterwards confessed, became enamoured at first sight. Under pretext of quail-shooting, he delayed his return to Florence; he

haunted the tavern, and laid siege to Caterina. Ser Pietro was already celebrated as a conqueror of women; he was four-and-twenty, handsome, strong, something of a coxcomb. He possessed that self-confident eloquence which in a lover is irresistible. Caterina hesitated, prayed to the Virgin for assistance, finally succumbed. At the time when the quails took their flight from the Val di Nievole, she was with child.

Ser Antonio da Vinci soon learned that his son had entangled himself with the maidservant at a village hostelry. He despatched him to Florence and wedded him as quickly as possible to Madonna Albiera di Ser Giovanni Amadori, who was neither very young nor very fair, but had a substantial dowry. Caterina he mated also with a peasant named Accattabrighe di Pietro del Vacca, who was said to have beaten his first wife to death in a drunken fit. The girl resigned herself without protest, but with inward grief which threw her into a fever when she was brought to bed. She was unable to suckle her child, and the little Leonardo was wet-nursed by a goat from Monte Albano. Pietro, however, begged his father to take Caterina's child to be bred in his house. In those times on one was ashamed of bastards, and they were frequently educated on the same footing as their legitimate brethren, and even preferred to them. Leonardo accordingly entered the virtuous and pious family of da Vinci, and was entrusted to the care of his grandmother, Lena di Pietro da Baccareto.

As the vision of a dream, Leonardo remembered his mother; more especially her smile, so delicate, so fleeting, full of mystery, and gently malicious; singularly in contrast with the habitual expression of her beautiful but melancholy face, which to some seemed even harshly severe. Once he found that smile again, on the face of a small antique bronze statue of Cybele, the immemorially ancient goddess of the earth; the same subtle smile which he remembered as the characteristic of the young peasant woman of Vinci—his mother.

He thought:

"Ah, how the mountain women, dressed in poor coarse raiment, excel in beauty those who are adorned!"

It was said by persons who had known Caterina that her son resembled her; his long and slender hands, his golden hair, his smile, were inherited from her. From his father he had a powerful frame, health, zest of life; from his mother that almost feminine charm. Brought up in the paternal house, Leonardo had never been entirely separated from his mother. Her cottage was not far from Ser Antonio's villa; and at midday when Accattabrighe had gone forth with the oxen, the boy would make his way through the vineyard, climb the wall, and run to his mother. She was awaiting him on the threshold, distaff in hand; she stretched out her arms, and when he came she covered his eyes, his lips, his hair with her kisses. Or at night when Accattabrighe would be at the

tavern, dicing and swilling, the child would escape from his bed, crawl through the window and down the fig-tree, and run to Caterina's home. Sweet to him was the cool of the dewy grass, the cry of the night-jar, the very nettles and stones which wounded his feet; the glow of the far-off stars, and the very anxiety lest his grandam should awake and miss him.

Yet Monna Lena likewise loved and pampered her grandson, and he remembered her well, her one vesture of dark brown, her white kerchief, her dark, wrinkled, kind old face, her lullabies, and the appetising odour of the *berlingozzi* which she baked after the ancient Tuscan recipe. With his grandfather he had not agreed so well. At first Ser Antonio had taught him personally; but Leonardo was an unwilling pupil, and at seven he was sent to the Oratory of Santa Petronilla. But neither was the Latin grammar to his liking. He played truant, wandering to a wild ravine behind the town where he would lie on his back watching the flight of the cranes with torturing envy; or unfolding the cups of flowers, wondering at their coloured petals and pollen-covered stamens, moist with honey. Sometimes during his grandfather's absence the little Nardo would escape for whole days in the mountains, making his way by the tracks of goats and along the edges of precipices to the summit of Monte Albano. Thence he could see a boundless expanse of meadows, pastures, groves, and forests; the marches of Fucecchio; and

Prato, Pistoia, Florence, and the snowy peaks of the Alps; when the sky was clear, the misty blue of the Mediterranean Sea. At last he would return home, dusty, sunburnt, his hands scratched, his garments torn; but his grandam, seeing his happiness, had not the heart to punish him or betray him to Ser Antonio. The boy lived alone; his father and his Uncle Francesco he saw but seldom, for they were away in Florence; with his schoolmates he did not associate. Their sports displeased him; on one occasion when they tore the wings from a butterfly and laughed at its writhings, he frowned, turned pale, and went away. Complaints of his surliness were in consequence made to Ser Antonio; great displeasure followed, threats, of flogging, and an actual imprisonment for three days in a cupboard under the staircase.

Later, recalling this link in a long chain of injustice, he wrote in his diary:

"If as a child you were put in prison for doing your duty, what will they do to you as a man?"

IV

Not far from Vinci a large villa was in course of construction by the Florentine architect, Biagio da Ravenna, a pupil of Alberti. Leonardo watched the raising of the walls, the levelling of the stonework, the elevation of huge blocks by machinery. One day Ser Biagio talked with the lad, and was astonished by the understanding which he

showed. At first in jest, then seriously, he taught him the first principles of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and mechanics. The teacher marvelled at the facility with which the boy caught each idea as it were on the wing and made it his own; it seemed as though he were not learning but remembering. The grandfather looked askance at what he called "caprices," and he thought it a bad omen that the boy used preferably his left hand when he wrote; for sorcerers, necromancers, and those who make compacts with the devil are, of course, always born left-handed! His suspicion of the lad increased when a neighbour from Fortuniano assured him that the old woman of the village on Monte Albano who had provided the black goat for the suckling of the babe was an undoubted witch.

"Do what you will," thought the old notary, "but if you bring up a wolf he will always have his eye on the forest. Well, well! Submit to the will of Heaven! There 's no family without *one* abortion."

And he waited with desperate anxiety for the birth of a legitimate heir to Pietro, his favourite son; since Nardo, the product of illicit love, was showing himself thus clearly "ill-born" into this eminently respectable family. 'T was a tale of Monte Albano, which indeed accounted for its name, that many plants and animals there mysteriously changed their natural colour into white; so that the traveller, roaming its woods and meadows, would chance upon white violets, white strawberries, white sparrows, white nestlings in a brood

of blackbirds. In like manner the little Nardo was one of the wonders of the White Mountain; a changeling in the virtuous and commonplace family of the Florentine notary; a big white cuckoo in a nest of blackbirds.

V

When the boy had reached the age of thirteen, his father removed him from Vinci to his house in Florence; since then he had rarely visited his birthplace. But long after, in one of his notebooks of the year 1494, when he was in the service of the Duke of Milan, he wrote, "Caterina came in July last year." It might signify the beginning of some kitchen wench's service; in reality it referred to his mother. Her husband had died, and feeling that her own time might be short, she desired to see her son at least once more. She joined a party of pilgrims on their way to Milan for adoration of the Holy Nail; journeyed from Tuscany, and presented herself at Leonardo's house. He received her with pious affection; for her he was ever the little Nardo, who had come secretly by night with bare feet and nestled at her side.

She would have returned to Anchiano, but her son would not permit it. He placed her in a quiet and commodiously fitted cell of the Convent of Santa Chiara, near the Porta Vercellina. Later she fell ill, and at her own request was taken to the *Ospedale Maggiore*, built by Francesco Sforza, and the finest hospital in Milan. Here he visited her

for months every day, at the last scarcely leaving her for an hour. Yet he had told none of his friends nor even his pupils of her presence in Milan.

But when for the last time he had pressed his lips on the cold hand of this peasant woman who had been his mother, it seemed to him that to her he owed everything. He honoured her with a sumptuous funeral.

Six years later, after the fall of Ludovico Sforza, when he was leaving Milan, he found a small carefully wrapped bundle in one of his chests. It contained a couple of coarse canvas shirts and three pair of goats'-hair stockings, all made by Caterina's hand, and brought to him from Vinci. He had never worn them, but now coming upon the poor things among his scientific books and mechanical apparatus, and the garments of fine linen to which he had habituated himself, he felt inexpressibly touched. Nor in the years which followed, when he was a solitary and weary wanderer from country to country, from town to town, did he ever omit to take this poor little parcel with him, packed among the dearest of his treasures.

VI

Such were Leonardo's recollections as he climbed the slopes of Monte Albano, familiar to him in his childhood. He sat down under the shelter of a rock and surveyed the well-remembered landscape. Dwarfed and gnarled oak-trees surrounded him

still hung with withered leaves; perfumed juniper, which the peasants called *scopa* (besom), pale shy violets, and low bushes of dried mountain heather, exhaled that intangible freshness which is the odour of spring. Far away the valley of the Arno met the sky; but to the right rose bare lofty mountains with undulating shadows, twisted hollows like gigantic serpents, and wide ravines, delicate purple in colour. At his feet was Anchiano, white and shining in the sunlight; farther away, Vinci clung to its little conical hill like a wasp's nest; the castle tower distinct and black as the two cypresses by the side of the Anchiano road.

Nothing was changed since the day when he had first climbed these paths. Forty years before, the *scopa* had grown as luxuriantly, the violets and thyme had scented the air, the oaks had rustled their withered leaves; as now, Monte Albano had seemed colourless, bare, northern. Etruria of the ancients, now Tuscany, land of perpetual spring, land of unfailing renaissance—to Leonardo it wore that subtle and tender smile brightening a beauty otherwise too austere, which he had first seen on the countenance of Caterina his peasant mother.

He rose and pursued his way, the path growing more rugged, the wind colder, sharper, more northerly. Memories of his youth crowded upon his soul.

VII

Ser Pietro da Vinci had prospered. Skilful and

good-hearted, his life ran upon greased wheels. Live and let live was his maxim, and he stood well with all, more especially with the clerical party. Procurator of the monastery of the Santissima Annunziata, and of many other rich foundations, he acquired wealth in abundance, adding largely to his property, but never changing the modest fashion of life which he had learned from Ser Antonio. His wife died when he was eight-and-thirty, but he soon married a young and beautiful girl, Madonna Francesca di Ser Giovanni Lanfredini. She, like her predecessor, was childless; and Leonardo, the bastard, lived with his father, and had every prospect of becoming his heir.

At that time Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli, a famous astronomer and mathematician, lived at Florence. He had written a letter to Christopher Columbus, assuring him on the authority of his calculations that the route to India by the Antipodes was neither so long nor so arduous as had been supposed, encouraging him to make the adventure, and prophesying its success. Columbus therefore carried out what had been conceived in the lonely cell of the Florentine scholar, and was, as it were, the instrument played by the hand of a skilled musician. Toscanelli was said by his contemporaries to "live like a saint"; reserved, frugal, chaste, he frequented neither the brilliant Medicean Court nor the vain assemblies of the Neoplatonist imitators of antiquity. His face was curiously ugly but redeemed by eyes of great brilliance.

One evening a lad, scarcely more than a child, knocked at his door and was coldly received, being suspected of mere idle curiosity. But short conversation with the young Leonardo—for it was he—convinced the astronomer, as before it had convinced Biagio da Ravenna, of his wonderful aptitude for mathematics. Ser Paolo became his teacher; on summer nights they went together to Poggio del Pino, one of those fragrant, pine-clad, heather-carpeted hills, girdling the City of Flowers; there Toscanelli had built his observatory. He taught the boy all he himself knew of the laws of the universe. It was from these lessons that Leonardo dated his faith in the experimental study of nature, as yet too much neglected by the philosophers.

Ser Pietro da Vinci, though he put no difficulties in the way of his son's studies, advised him to choose some more lucrative occupation; having noticed his bent towards modelling and drawing, he showed some of the boy's work to Andrea Verrocchio, the painter and goldsmith; and shortly afterwards Leonardo was formally entered as one of this artist's pupils.

VIII

Verrocchio, the son of a poor furnace-stoker, was seventeen years the senior of Leonardo. His face was placid, flat, and pale, with a double chin. Only in his tight shut lips and piercing eyes was there

evidence of singular intelligence. Spectacles on nose, magnifier in hand, he sat in his dark *bottega* near the Ponte Vecchio, looking more like a small shopkeeper than a great artist. A disciple of Paolo Uccello, he, like his master, affirmed that Perspective must be based on science. "Geometry," he said, "being a part of mathematics, mother of all knowledge, is also the mother of drawing, which is the father of all the arts." Complete knowledge and complete enjoyment of beauty were to him identical. Unlike Botticelli, and others of his kidney, Verrocchio was neither ravished by extraordinary beauty nor repelled by unusual deformity. In both he found occasion for study. He was also the first master who made anatomical models. If Botticelli had found the fascination of art in the miraculous, in the fabulous, in that mystic haze which confounds Olympus with Golgotha—for Verrocchio it lay in patient investigation and a firm grasp of the verities of nature. The miraculous was not true for him. Truth was the miracle.

This was the man to whom Ser Pietro brought his seventeen-year-old son; he became Leonardo's teacher; further, he became his disciple. The monks of Vallombrosa had commissioned Ser Andrea to paint them a *Baptism of Christ*, and the master set his pupil to execute the kneeling angel which formed part of the composition. The result showed Verrocchio that his scholar knew intuitively and clearly all that he himself had

dimly guessed and sought for gropingly, slowly, and laboriously, through a fog.

Later it was said that Verrocchio gave up painting because jealous of the young man's superiority; in reality there was never anything but harmony between the two. Each supplied the deficiency of the other. The pupil had lightness and precision of touch; Verrocchio, perseverance and concentrated attention. They worked together without envy, without rivalry, scarce knowing how much they owed each other.

At that time Verrocchio executed the bronze group for Orsanmichele, which was known as the *Incredulity of St. Thomas*. It was altogether unlike the celestial dreams of the Beato Angelico or the delirious idealism of Sandro Botticelli. In St. Thomas's mysterious smile, as he put his fingers into the print of the nails, was exhibited for the first time the boldness of man before his God; Reason face to face with Miracle.

IX

Leonardo's first independent work was a cartoon for a curtain of Flanders tissue, a gift from the Florentines to the King of Portugal. The subject was the *Fall of Man*; and such was the accuracy with which the palm branches, the flowers, and the animals of Paradise were drawn, that Vasari the critic was stupefied at so great patience.

Eve, stretching out her hand to the Tree of

The Baptism of Christ (Verrocchio, Florence).

Photo by Anderson.

Knowledge, wore the same smile of bold curiosity which Verrocchio had given to St. Thomas.

A little later Ser Pietro employed his son to paint one of those round wooden shields called *rotelle*, which were used as ornaments for houses, and which generally carried some allegorical design. Leonardo painted an animal, terrible as the face of Medusa. He had collected lizards, snakes, crickets, spiders, centipedes, moths, scorpions, bats, every sort of noxious creature, and had studied their characteristics. By a process of selection and exaggeration of their individual truth, he had put together a monster, such as had never existed, yet which might have been possible, deducing what is not from what is with the precision of an Euclid or a Pythagoras. The beast was issuing from its den in the rock; grating its black and shining scales upon the gravel. Fetor exhaled from its gaping jaws, smoke from its nostrils; its eyes were flame. Horrible as was the monster, the wonder of it lay less in its deformity than in its charm, which was no less powerful than the charm of beauty.

Day and night Leonardo had studied and painted in the stifling room empoisoned by the stench from the dead reptiles; at last the picture was finished, and he summoned his father to see it. He had placed it on a wooden stand surrounded by black cloth, the light being so disposed that only the monster was illuminated. Sir Pietro came in, saw the beast, and involuntarily drew back. Recover-

Meanwhile, Ser Pietro married his third wife, Margherita, who brought him two sons, Antonio and Giuliano. The stepmother hated Leonardo, and accused her husband of wasting the inheritance of his lawful children upon a bastard, foster-child of a witch's goat. The young painter had enemies also among his fellow-students; and it was one of them who brought against him and against Verrocchio the accusation of which Cesare da Sesto had told Giovanni Boltraffio. The calumny had acquired some verisimilitude from the exceptional friendship between master and scholar, and from the fact that Leonardo, though the handsomest man of young Florence—("in his exterior," says a contemporary, "there was such radiance of beauty that at sight of him sad hearts were gladdened")—eschewed the society of women. The accusation came to nothing, but he left Verrocchio, and henceforth painted independently.

Reports now got about touching his heresies and atheism, and it became increasingly difficult for him to remain in Florence. Ser Pietro introduced him to Lorenzo de' Medici; uselessly, however, for *Il Magnifico* disapproved spirits too daring and unconventional, and demanded a constant and servile adulation which Leonardo was ill fitted to supply. The tedium of inaction oppressed him. He entered into negotiations with the Egyptian ambassador for the purpose of obtaining the post of chief architect to the "diodario" of Syria, though he knew that it would require his embracing the

Mahometan faith. His one desire was to escape from Florence. Chance favoured him. He made a many-stringed silver lute in the form of a horse's head, which took Lorenzo de' Medici's fancy. Lorenzo sent it by the hand of the inventor to Milan, as a gift to Ludovico Sforza.

Leonardo was received at the Lombard Court not as a man of science, not as a painter, but as the *sonatore di lira*—the "player of the lyre."

But before starting he had written a long letter to the Duke, setting forth how useful he might be to him.

"Most Illustrious Lord: Having studied and estimated the works of the present inventors of warlike engines, I have found that in them there is nothing novel to distinguish them. I therefore force myself to address Your Excellency that I may disclose to you the secrets of my art.

"1st. I have a method for bridges, very light and very strong; easy of transport and incombustible.

"2nd. New means of destroying any fortress or castle (which hath not foundations hewn of solid rock) without the employment of bombards.

"3rd. Of making mines and passages, immediately and noiselessly, under ditches and streams.

"4th. I have designed irresistible protected chariots for the carrying of artillery against the enemy.

"5th. I can construct bombards, cannon, mortars, *passavolanti*: all new and very beautiful.

"6th. Likewise battering rams, machines for the casting of projectiles, and other astounding engines.

"7th. For sea-combats I have contrivances both offensive and defensive; ships whose sides repel stone and iron balls, and explosives, unknown to any soul.

"8th. In the days of peace, I should hope to satisfy Your Excellency in architecture, in the erection of public and private buildings, in the construction of canals and aqueducts. I am acquainted with the arts of sculpture and painting, and can execute orders in marble, metal, clay, or in painting with oil, as well as any artist. And I can undertake that equestrian statue cast in bronze, which shall eternally glorify the blessed memory of Your Lordship's father and of the illustrious House of Sforza.

"And if any of the above seem extravagant or beyond the reach of possibility, I offer myself prepared to make experiment in your park; or in whatsoever place it may please Your Excellency to appoint; to whose gracious attention I most humbly recommend myself.

"Leonardo da Vinci."

When he caught his first glimpse of the snow-clad Alps shining above the green plain of Lombardy, he felt himself entering upon a new life, in a strange land which was to become his true country.

X

Such was the half century of life upon which Leo-

nardo looked back as he ascended Monte Albano. The path had become direct, vegetation was left below, the mountains were bare, solitary, and terrible, as belonging to another planet. He was blinded by fierce gusts of icy wind. Stones breaking away from his feet fell noisily into the ravine. He was still ascending, and at every step the prospect widened. He found exhilaration in the effort of climbing, gradually conquering the great mountains and compelling them to give up their treasures. Florence was out of sight, but the spacious district of Empoli was spread at his feet; first the mountains, cold dull purple with broad shadows; then the unnumbered billowy hills from Livorno to San Gimignano. Everywhere was air, emptiness, space. The narrow footpath seemed to vanish; he fancied himself flying over this boundless expanse on gigantic wings. The realisation that he had no such equipment produced in his mind the wondering alarm felt by a man who is suddenly deprived of his legs. He remembered how in boyhood he used to watch the flight of cranes; and how, hearing their cry, he had fancied it a summons to himself, and had wept for disappointment that he could not obey. He remembered releasing his grandfather's cage-birds, and joying in the wild swoops of their recovered liberty. He remembered listening to the tale of Icarus, who had thought to fly on waxen wings, but had fallen and perished; and how, when bidden by his teacher to name the greatest of ancient heroes, he had

answered, without a moment's hesitation, "Icarus, son of Dædalus." He remembered, too, his pleasure in finding a clumsy representation of his hero among the bas-reliefs of Giotto's campanile in Florence. He retained one other memory of his childhood which, however absurd it might have seemed to another, had for him a prophetic meaning. He wrote of it:

"I remember that once in infancy, lying in my cradle, I fancied that a kite flew to me and opened my lips, and rubbed his feathers over them. It would seem to be my destiny all my life to talk about wings."

The question of human flight had indeed become the preoccupation of his whole life. Now, even as forty years before, standing again on the slope of the White Mountain it seemed to him an intolerable injury, even an impossibility, that men should remain wingless.

"He who knows all can do all," thought Leonardo. "I have only to *know;* and there shall be wings."

XI

On one of the final zigzags of the path he felt himself touched from behind, and turning saw Giovanni Boltraffio who, hat in hand, eyes half shut, head bent, was battling with the wind, and had evidently been calling for some time unheard. When he saw the Master with long hair streaming

on the blast, and look of indomitable will, his thoughtful eyes, deep lines on his forehead, and overhanging brows contracted in a frown, he seemed to the disciple so strange and terrible as to be barely recognisable. Even the broad folds of his red cloak bellying in the wind were like the pinions of some strange bird.

Giovanni shouted as loud as he could, but he was so much out of breath he could only articulate broken phrases.

"Just come—from Florence. Letter—important—told to give it into your hands at once!"

Leonardo guessed at a communication from Cæsar Borgia, and quickly recognised the writing of Messer Agapito his secretary.

"Go down at once," said Leonardo, seeing Giovanni blue with cold. "I will follow you immediately." And he watched Boltraffio as he fought his way through the storm, clinging to frail boughs of low-growing shrubs, crawling over rocks, bending double, absurdly small and weak in comparison with his surroundings and the fury of the elements. He appeared an epitome of all human weakness; and, watching him, Leonardo was reminded of the curse of some grave impotence which seemed to have lain upon his whole life, which had, he feared, condemned him to eternal sterility, besides depriving him of the sympathy of his fellows.

"My wings!" he thought. "Ah! will not they fail like everything else?"

Icarus (Giotto, Florence).

Photo by Alinari.

And he remembered the words spoken by Astro in his delirium, the answer of the Son of Man when the Devil would have seduced him by the terror of the abyss, by the fascination of flight: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God!"

He raised his head, set his teeth, and again addressed himself to the ascent, conquering the mountain and the storm. The path had disappeared. He guided himself over the bare rocks where, perhaps, none had trodden before. Suddenly he found himself upon the edge of a precipice, till now unseen; misty dull purple filled the air and yawned beneath his feet as if the void and endless heaven were below no less than above. The wind had become a hurricane, and howled and roared like continuous thunder. Leonardo could have fancied that unseen evil birds—flock after flock—were sweeping past him on gigantic wings. No further advance was possible; never had the long familiar idea appealed to him with such force; never had he been so impressed by the logic, by the necessity, of the power of flight.

"*There shall be wings!*" he cried; "if the accomplishment be not for me, 't is for some other. It shall be done. The spirit cannot lie; and man, who shall know all and who shall have wings, shall indeed be as a god."

And he pictured to himself the King of the Air, Him who can pass all bounds and supersede all the laws which limit human intelligence, the Son of Man coming in his glory and power, the *Magno*

Cecero, "the Great Swan," borne on wings immense, white, shining as light itself, in the blue of heaven.

And his soul was filled with a joy akin to terror.

XII

As he descended from Monte Albano the sun was setting. The pointed cypresses were black against the golden sky; the receding mountains tender and translucent as amethyst. The wind had subsided. He was approaching Anchiano, and the hill town of Vinci was already in sight.

He stopped, and murmured:

"From the mountain which takes its name from the conqueror (Vinci—Vincere) Man shall take his first flight!"

And gazing at his birthplace, there at the foot of the White Mountain, he repeated: "Eternal glory to the nest whence he sprang!"

The letter from Messer Agapito announced the approaching siege of Faenza, and demanded the immediate presence of the new engineer and architect in Cæsar Borgia's camp.

Two days later Leonardo left Florence for Romagna.

BOOK XII

"AUT CÆSAR AUT NIHIL."

CÆSAR BORGIA.

1500–1503

"A prince must be a beast as well as a man."

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI.—*Il Principe.*

I

"WE, Cæsar Borgia of France, by the Grace of God, Duke of Romagna, Lord of Piombino, Gonfaloniere of the Holy Roman Church, and Captain-General:

"To all our lieutenants, castellans, captains, condottieri, officers, and subjects:

"We commend unto you the most famous and well-beloved Leonardo Vinci, our architect and chief war-engineer, and command that ye give him everywhere unhindered passage, permitting him to examine, measure, and judge of everything he may desire to see in our fortresses, and affording him all co-operation, and as many men as he may need to help him. And we bid our other contractors to enter into accord in all matters with

the will of the above-mentioned Leonardo, to whom we entrust the oversight of all the fortresses and castles in our dominions.

"Given at Pavia on August 18th, in the year of our Lord, 1502, and the second of our reign in Romagna.

"CÆSAR, dux Romandiolæ."

So ran Leonardo's new credentials.

These were the years in which Cæsar Borgia was gradually recovering for Alexander VI. the ancient States of the Church, said to have been conferred on the papacy by Constantine the Great. He had taken the town of Faenza from the eighteen-year-old Astorre Manfredi; and Forlì from Caterina Sforza. The lad and the woman had been confided to his protection. He threw them both into the Castle of St. Angelo. He concluded a fraudulent treaty with the Duke of Urbino, and in 1502 planned a campaign against Bologna. He was intent upon making himself sole and absolute ruler of Italy. In September his enemies, including the Dukes of Perugia and Siena, as well as other important personages, assembled at Mugione, and concluded a secret alliance against him. Vitellozzo Vitelli swore the oath of Hannibal, that within a year he would slay, imprison, or exile the common foe. Report of this alliance having been bruited abroad, it was joined by some of the greater princes. Urbino rose in revolt; Cæsar's own troops mutinied; the King of France was slow in coming to his help;

The Castle of St. Angelo (Rome).

Photo by Anderson.

he seemed on the verge of ruin. Nevertheless he still had resources, and his enemies were dilatory. The opportunity was let slip, and presently these, his allied enemies, entered into negotiations with the usurper. He overreached them, contriving to set them at variance with each other; by profound dissimulation and courteous manners converted them to a more or less favourable attitude; and presently made an urgent appointment to meet his foes in parley at the newly-conquered town of Sinigaglia.

Leonardo had quickly become a prominent personage at Cæsar's Court. The Duke employed him in adorning the various towns with palaces, libraries, schools, barracks, and canals. He constructed engines of war, made military maps, and was present at all Cæsar's bloodiest exploits.

Leonardo did not wish to see too clearly, or to know too accurately, what was taking place around him. He eschewed politics. He confined himself almost entirely to observations on physical and social phenomena: the manner of planting orchards, the machinery for ringing the bells at Siena Cathedral, the low music of the falling water in the fountain of Rimini, the dove-cot in the Castle of Urbino. He noted how the shepherds at the foot of the Apennines placed their horns in the narrow openings of deep hollows, so that echo should increase the volume of their sound. For whole days he stood on the desolate shore of Piombino, watching the falling of the waves; and while all around him the

laws of human justice were being broken, mused on the invariability of nature, and found deep-seated joy in the eternal justice of the Prime Mover.

On a day in June the corpses of the young Astorre and his brother were found in the Tiber, stones tied round their necks. The crime was universally attributed to Cæsar. But that day Leonardo noted:

"In Romagna four-wheeled carts are used, the front wheels small, the back large: the construction is faulty, for all the weight rests on the front."

II

In the latter half of December, 1502, the Duke of Valentinois, with his whole Court, moved from Cesena to Fano, on the shores of the Adriatic, twenty miles from Sinigaglia, where the meeting was appointed with his former enemies, Oliverotto da Fermo, Vitellozzo Vitelli, and Gian Paolo Baglioni. A few days later Leonardo came from Pesaro to join his patron.

On the way he was overtaken by a storm. The mountains were covered with impassable snow-drifts, the mules slipped on the ice; great waves were heard breaking on the seashore at the foot of the precipice. As darkness came on the travellers lost the path, and, dropping the reins, they trusted themselves to the instinct of their beasts. The mule Leonardo was riding suddenly stopped and grew restive, scenting the corpse of a man who had

been hanged, which still dangled from the branch of a solitary tree.

At last they saw a distant light, and the guide recognised the inn at Novilara, a mountain town half way between Pesaro and Fano. The travellers quickened their steps, and presently were knocking at the massive entrance door, studded with nails like the gate of a fortress. A sleepy ostler came first; then the landlord, who declined to receive the new arrivals. All his rooms, all his stables were overfilled; there was not a bed in which three or four were not sleeping—all persons of quality, soldiers and courtiers of the Duke's suite.

Leonardo told his name and exhibited his credentials, sealed with the Duke's seal. The host poured forth a torrent of apology, and made offer of his own chamber, which at present contained only three French captains, all passably drunk and sound asleep.

Leonardo entered the kitchen, which according to the wont of the Romagna inns served also as a parlour. It was very dirty, with patches of damp on the bare walls; guinea-fowl were sleeping on their perches, and baby porkers squeaking round the door; onions, gherkins, and sausages were suspended from the ceiling. A whole pig was roasting before the immense glowing fire. Guests crowded at long tables, drinking and quarrelling over cards.

Leonardo sat down by the stove, and presently, at a square board close by, he saw Baldassarre

Scipioni, an old man, formerly captain of the Duke's lancers; Alessandro Spanocchia, the treasurer; Pandolfo Collenuccio, legate from Ferrara, and a fourth gentleman, a stranger, who was gesticulating forcibly, and crying in a thin squeaky voice:

"I can prove this also, *Messeri!* I can prove this by instances from ancient and from modern history! Call to mind the states which have acquired military glory—Romans, Spartans, Athenians, Ætolians, and the trans-Alpine hordes. All the great commanders collected their armies from the citizens of their own country. Ninus from the Assyrians, Cyrus from the Persians, Alexander from the Macedonians. I grant you that Pyrrhus and Hannibal won victories by means of mercenaries, but these were generals of exceptional genius. Nor must ye forget my main proposition—the very corner-stone of military science—*viz.*, that in infantry, and infantry alone, lies the strength of an army. Not in cavalry, not in firearms and powder, ridiculous toy inventions of modern times."

"You go too far, Messer Niccolò," replied the captain of lancers, with a smile; "firearms are becoming of some importance. Whatever you say about the Romans and the Spartans, I venture to think our troops are much better equipped. A squadron of our French soldiers, or a battery of thirty bombards, would have made short work of your ancient Romans."

"Sophisms! Sophisms!" retorted Messer Niccolò, with increasing excitement. "I perceive in

your words fearfully perilous error! Some day the Italians will be taught, by a rude lesson, the weakness of mercenary armies, and the pitiful powerlessness of cavalry and artillery. Remember how the handfuls of Lucullus routed 150,000 horsemen, among whom were cohorts of mounted men exactly similar to the squadrons of the present French cavalry!"

Leonardo looked curiously at this man who spoke like an eye-witness of the victories of Lucullus. The stranger wore a long garment of dark red cloth, falling in straight folds; it resembled that worn by the statesmen of the Florentine Republic and the secretaries of the embassies. It was, however, old and stained. The sleeves were threadbare, and such linen as was to be seen was frayed and soiled. The man had great bony hands, copiously dyed with ink, and a wart on one finger. There was little dignity in his air; he was lean and narrow-shouldered, about forty years of age, and with sharp irregular features. Sometimes when he was speaking he would look over the head of his interlocutor, as if peering into space like some long-sighted rapacious bird. In his restless movements, in the feverish flush of his swarthy cheeks, above all in the intentness of his large grey eyes, there was evidence of smouldering fire within. The eyes themselves were malicious; yet at times, in their sardonic smile, in their cold displeasure, there was an expression of weakness almost pathetic.

Messer Niccolò continued to pour forth his

notions; and Leonardo marvelled at the strange mixture of truth and error in his talk, at his audacity, and his slavish appeal to the authority of the ancients. He approved him when he spoke of the scientific difficulty in using guns of large calibre, owing to the inaccuracy of their range; but the next minute he asserted that fortresses were useless because the Spartans and the Romans built none. He appeared to regard the opinions of the Greeks and Romans much as Leonardo regarded mathematical axioms. The latter, however, did not hear the conclusion of the dispute, as the landlord called him to the bedchamber reserved for him upstairs.

III

It snowed all night, and in the morning the guide refused to continue the journey, the weather being in his opinion not fit even for a dog to go out in. Leonardo was forced to remain at the inn. He amused himself trying a self-turning roasting-spit which he had invented.

"With this mechanism," he expounded to the astonished onlookers, "the cook need have no fear of burning the meat, for the action of the fire remains even. With increase of heat it turns faster, that is all."

It would seem that the success of his flying-machine could hardly have afforded him greater pleasure then the perfection of this cooking engine.

In the same room Messer Niccolò was explaining to certain young artillery sergeants an infallible system, based on abstract mathematics, for winning at dice—"circumventing," as he called it, "the caprices of the strumpet Fortune." Every time he tried to give a practical illustration of its value, he lost, greatly to his own astonishment and to the amusement of his audience. The conclusion of the game was unexpected and not entirely to Messer Niccolò's glory. It revealed that his pouch was empty, and that he could not meet his losses.

Late that evening there arrived another guest, with a great array of servants, pages, grooms, jesters, negroes, animals, boxes, and chests. It was the elegant Venetian courtesan, the *magnifica meretrice*, Lena Griffi, who had been so nearly despoiled by Savonarola's "youthful inquisitors." Two years ago, following the example of many of her sisterhood, the repentant Magdalen had cut her hair and shut herself up in a convent. This was, however, merely an artifice to raise her price in the city tariff of courtesans, drawn up for the use of strangers. From the monastic chrysalis she had emerged like a butterfly awakened to a new and more splendid life. Very soon the *mammola veneziana* had risen to great celebrity, and had fashioned for herself, according to the usage of the principal courtesans, a fine genealogical-tree, by which it appeared that she was the daughter of Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, brother of

Ludovico, Duke of Milan. She became the mistress of an old and doting Cardinal, whose infirmities were palliated by his wealth, and was now journeying to Fano, where her elderly lover was attached to Cæsar Borgia's camp. The host could not refuse admission to so exalted a personage. He accommodated her suite by turning out certain Ancona merchants from a fair-sized bedroom, housing them in the forge, and promising them a reduction in their bill. Similar treatment he proposed for Messer Niccolò and his roommates, the French captains, in order to provide a chamber for the lady herself.

Messer Niccolò, however, protested, and grew very angry, asking the landlord if he had lost his reason, if he knew with whom he was speaking, if it were not unheard-of insolence to insult respectable people for the pleasing of the first jade tumbled in out of the street. Here intervened the hostess, a masterful lady who, in the words of the proverb, had not "pawned her tongue to a Jew"; she suggested that before making so much noise he had better pay the bill for himself, his servant, and his three horses; and also return the four ducats lent him last Friday by her husband. And she added, in a stage whisper, that she wished a bad Easter to all the adventurers and beggars who swarmed on the high-roads, and, pretending to be great ones, lived at free quarters and mocked at honest people. No doubt there was some applicability in all this, for Messer Niccolò was reduced to silence, and seemed

considering how he could retire with the best grace from his position. Meantime, servants were already removing his goods, and Madonna Lena's monkey was grimacing at him, and jumping over the table among his papers and great leather books, the *Decades* of Livy and Plutarch's *Lives*.

Leonardo now approached and said, raising his *berretta:*

"Messere, if it would please you to share my room, I shall account it an honour, if Your Worship will permit me to render so slight a service."

Niccolò seemed astonished, and even confused; recovering himself, however, he accepted the offer with suitable thanks. Leonardo took him to his room, and assigned him the best place. The more he looked at this strange man the more attractive and interesting did he seem to him. He presently learned his name: he was Machiavelli, secretary to the Council of Ten in the Florentine Republic.

Three months earlier the astute and vigilant Signoria had sent Machiavelli to make a treaty with Cæsar Borgia. The latter had proposed a defensive alliance against their common enemies, Bentivoglio, the Vitelli, and the Orsini; but the Florentines, fearing the Duke too much to desire either his friendship or his enmity, had commanded their envoy to meet his propositions merely with diplomatic and ambiguous expressions of goodwill, and secretly to obtain free passage for their traders through the Duke's territory along the shores of

the Adriatic, a matter of no small importance to their commerce.

Leonardo also disclosed his name and rank; and soon he and his new friend were conversing with that ease and mutual confidence occasionally natural to persons of opposite character, and habitually solitary and meditative.

"Messere," burst out Niccolò, and his candour was not unattractive, "I know you by repute as a great painter; but I warn you I have no knowledge of painting, nor am I even fond of it. Of course you may respond, as did Dante to the street mocker who offered him a fig, 'I would n't change one of mine for twenty of yours!' but I confess I am more interested in having learnt from the Duke that you are an expert in military science. How important that is! Civil greatness is founded upon war, and depends on the regular army. I am writing a book on monarchies and republics, wherein I shall discuss the natural laws which govern the life, growth, decline, and death of every state, just like a mathematician discussing the laws of number, or a natural philosopher physics. Hitherto, sir, all who have written about the state——"

Here he stopped, and chid himself with a good-humoured smile.

"Forgive me, Messere, I am taking a mean advantage. It may be that policy interests you as little as painting interests me?"

"Not so," said Leonardo. "I tell you candidly I don't affect statecraft, because such talk is apt

Niccolò Machiavelli.

Photo by Brogi.

to be idle. But your opinions are so new and surprising, that, believe me, I am thrice happy to learn."

"Beware, Messer Leonardo," said the other; "these matters are my hobby-horse. I will go without bread, if I may but talk upon politics with a man of understanding. The mischief is to find the man of understanding! Our great ones think of naught but the price of wool and of silk, while I" (he smiled bitterly) "am made of neither."

Leonardo reassured him, and added, in order to keep the conversation going:

"You have said, Messere, that politics should be an exact science founded upon mathematics, like mechanics, which finds its certainty in the observation and experience of nature. Did I understand you aright?"

"Perfectly!" cried Machiavelli, frowning, and looking into space beyond his companion's head, with that air of a far-sighted bird habitual to him. "I desire to reveal a new thing to men about human affairs. The laws of nature, which are outside man's will, outside good and evil are the laws which guide the life of every society. All former writers on this subject have dealt with the good and the bad, the noble and the base. I do not concern myself with governments which ought to be, nor with what seems to be, but with that which really is. I inquire into the nature of the great bodies, known as republics and monarchies, and I commit myself neither to praise nor to blame, like a mathe-

matician or an anatomist. I will tell men the truth, even if they burn me for it, as they burned Fra Girolamo. For the task is dangerous."

Leonardo smiled, observing Machiavelli's excitement, and thought: "With what passion he praises dispassionateness!"

"Messer Niccolò," he said aloud, "if you succeed according to your intentions, you will have done more than Euclid or Archimedes."

Leonardo was struck by the unconventionality of what he had heard. He remembered how, thirteen years earlier, he had himself written on the margin of certain anatomical sketches:

"May the Most High assist me to study the nature of human beings, their temperaments and habits, even as here I have studied their internal organs!"

IV

Suddenly Machiavelli exclaimed, his eyes sparkling merrily: "The more I listen to you, Messer Leonardo, the more I am astounded that we should have met. Some most rare combination of the stars! The minds of men are, I protest, of three qualities. First, those who see of themselves; secondly, those who see when they are shown; thirdly, those who see not of themselves, neither see when they are shown. Your Worship, and I myself (for I would not be guilty of false modesty) belong to the first category. But you laugh? Ah!

such a meeting will not easily come to me again on this side the grave, for on earth the elect are few. Permit me to read you a most beautiful piece of Livy."

He took a book from the table, adjusted the tallow candle, put on iron spectacles (broken and tied up with string), the large round glasses of which gave him a grave and devout expression, as if he were addressing himself to some act of worship. But no sooner had he found his passage, and opened his lips, than the door opened, and a little wrinkled old woman came in curtseying and bowing.

"I crave your pardon, gentlemen, for this annoyance," she mumbled, "but my illustrious lady, Madonna Lena Griffi, has lost her favourite animal —a rabbit with a blue ribbon round its neck. We have searched two hours for it but vainly."

"There are no rabbits here," said Messer Niccolò, angrily; "go to the devil!" And he was about to eject her, but suddenly checked himself, and having looked at her narrowly, both with and without his spectacles, he cried:

"Monna Alvigia! Is it really you, you old witch? I thought the Devil had long ago roasted your old carcase!"

The woman blinked and cowered, answering his polite greeting with a sorry smile.

"Oh, Messer Niccolò! how many years, how many winters since we have seen each other! I

had never expected God would give us this pleasure again!"

Machiavelli invited the old woman to follow him to the kitchen for a crack; but Leonardo, providing himself with a book and seating himself in a corner, begged them to remain. Then Messer Niccolò sent for wine with a lordly air, as if he were the most honoured guest in the inn.

"Hark ye, friend," he said to the servant who took his order, "bid that skinflint, your master, beware how he serve us that acid stuff we had yesterday, for Monna Alvigia and I are like Arlotto the priest, who would not kneel if the wine were bad."

Monna Alvigia forgot her rabbit and Niccolò his Livy; over their pitcher of wine they gossiped like old friends. Alvigia told tales of her youth when she had been fair to see and much courted, and she had done what she wished and it had not mattered what she did. Had she not once in Padua lifted the mitre from the head of the bishop and placed it upon her own? But years passed by, and her beauty faded, and her lovers abandoned her, and she had to support herself by hiring rooms and by taking in washing. Then she fell ill, and she thought of sitting among the beggars at the church door, and even of ending herself by poison. But the Holy Virgin came to her aid and rescued her from death. With the aid of an old abbot, who was in love with the young wife of a blacksmith, she entered upon a trade far more profitable than that of a laundress.

The story was interrupted by a summons from Madonna Lena, who required pomade for her monkey's wounded paw, and Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which she always kept under her pillow beside her prayer-book.

The old woman gone, Messer Niccolò mended a pen, took paper, and began his report to the Magnificent Signori of Florence, on the disposition and actions of the Duke of Valentinois, a piece of profound statesmanship, written in easy, almost jocular style.

"Messere," he exclaimed, raising his eyes to Leonardo, "confess I surprised you by my sudden passage from discussion of the virtue of ancient Sparta to vain gossip about women with that old hag! Judge me not too harshly! We must imitate nature. Are we not men? Is it not legended that Aristotle, in the very presence of Alexander his pupil, permitted the leman whom he loved to ride on his back while he caracoled on all fours? Shall simple sinners be more discreet?"

By this time the household slept. All was silent save for the chirp of the cricket, the muttering of Monna Alvigia, and the growling of the monkey as she anointed its paw. Leonardo had gone to bed, but lay watching his quaint companion, who still gnawed his pen and stooped over his writing. The candle flame threw on the wall a vast shadow of his head with its sharp-cut angles, its protruding lower lip, its thin neck and long beak-like nose. Having finished his report he sealed

it up, and wrote the words usual on despatches: "*Cito, citissime, celerrime.*" Then he opened his Livy and pursued his occupation of many years, the compiling of notes for the *Decades.*

The shadow on the wall danced and wavered and grimaced as the candle flickered and burned low; but the face of the Florentine secretary preserved its stern and dignified calm: the reflection of the greatness of ancient Rome. Only in the depth of his eyes, in the corners of his lips there showed sometimes a two-faced cunning, a mocking cynicism.

V

Next day the storm was over. The sun sparkled on the frozen windows; the snowy fields and hills, soft as down, shone dazzling white under the azure sky. His companion was no longer in the room when Leonardo awoke. He dressed and descended to the kitchen where, to the joy of the cook, a joint was roasting on the automatic spit.

He ordered his mule and sat down to breakfast. Beside him was Messer Niccolò talking excitedly to a couple of newcomers. One of these was a faultlessly fashionable youth with an undistinguished face, a certain Messer Lucio, related to Francesco Vettori. This Vettori was a man of note in Florence, intimately connected with Pietro Soderini the *Gonfaloniere*, and very favourably disposed to Machiavelli. He had sent Lucio with letters to Messer Niccolò from his friends.

"Be not disquieted about the money," Lucio was saying; "my uncle assures me that last Thursday the Signori promised——"

"But, my dear sir," interrupted Machiavelli, "can two servants and three horses be fed with promises? At Imola I received sixty ducats and paid debts of seventy. If it were not for the compassion of the benevolent, the secretary of the Florentine Republic would starve. It is vain for the Signori to talk of the honour of their town if they force the man whom they send to a strange Court to beg for his sheer necessities."

Messer Niccolò knew these complaints were useless, but it solaced him to make them. The kitchen being nearly empty, he spoke without reserve.

"Here is our fellow-citizen, Messer Leonardo da Vinci—the *Gonfaloniere* must know him," resumed Machiavelli, indicating the painter, to whom Lucio bowed courteously. "Messer Leonardo was witness only last night of the humiliations to which I am daily subjected. I demand—hear you?—I do not ask, but I demand leave to resign my office," he concluded, his anger still waxing, and addressing the young Florentine as if he saw in him the whole Magnificent Signoria. "I am a poor man, sir, and my affairs go from bad to worse, and my health likewise. If matters continue as they are I shall return home in my coffin. Moreover, I have done all which is possible to do, with the poor powers accorded me. To drag out the

negotiation, to go round and about, one step forward and two steps back, 'I will' and 'I won't' —that is not work for me! The Duke is too clever for such childishness! Well, I have written to your uncle——"

"My uncle," interrupted Lucio, "will doubtless do all he can for you, Messer Niccolò; but the Magnificent Ten, to tell truth, consider your reports so essential to the weal of the republic that they will not permit you to retire. 'Who is there,' they say, 'able to take his place? He is a man of gold; he is the ear and the eye of our commonwealth!' I swear to you, Messere, that your letters have so great a success in Florence that you could not desire a greater. All are bewitched by the incomparable felicity of your style. My uncle informed me that at a late meeting in the council chamber, upon the reading of one of your merry letters, the Signori burst themselves with laughter——'

"Oh, that 's it, is it?" exclaimed Machiavelli, his face contorted with rage. "Ah, now I understand! My letters are amusing to the Magnificent Signori; they burst themselves with laughter, and they admire my diction. Thank God, Niccolò Machiavelli is capable of something! Yet I live here like a dog, I freeze and go hungry, I shake with fever, and am insulted by landlords, all for the good of the republic. The devil take the republic, and the *Gonfaloniere* too, snivelling old woman! May you all be buried unshriven and uncoffined!"

And he burst into the vulgar vituperation of the market-place, helplessly furious at the thought of these chiefs of the people, so utterly despicable, and yet his masters. To divert his thoughts Lucio handed him a letter from his young wife, Marietta: a few lines written in a round childish hand on coarse grey paper.

"*Carissimo Niccolò mio,*" so she wrote, "I am told that in those parts, where you are now, fevers and other sicknesses abound. You may fancy my care for you. My thoughts give me no peace day nor night. The boy, thank God, is well. He grows apace, and is like you. His little face is white as the snowdrift, but his head, with its thick black curls, is like yours. He seems beautiful to me because he is like you. He is lively and merry as though he were a year old. Believe me, directly he was born he opened his eyes and he shouted with a voice which filled the house. I pray you, forget us not. I entreat, return to us at the earliest moment, for to wait longer passeth my endurance. And meanwhile, may the Lord protect you, and the Blessed Virgin! I send you two shirts and two handkerchiefs and a towel. Your,

"MARIETTA in Florence."

Leonardo observed that Machiavelli reading this letter seemed another man. His face lit up with a tender smile not to be expected on his harsh features. The smile, however, quickly disap-

peared. He shrugged his shoulders, crumpled the letter and stuffed it into his pouch, then said savagely:

"Who told her I was ill?"

"Messer Niccolò," replied Lucio, "every day Monna Marietta has been to the members of the council asking for you, and inquiring where you are and how you fare."

"I know! I know! 'T was like to be so. Affairs of state should be reserved for celibates. One of the two—politics or a wife—not both." Then he turned abruptly and said: "And you yourself, good youth; you are perhaps thinking of wedding?"

"Not at present, Messer Niccolò," replied Lucio.

"Never commit that folly; unless you have the shoulders of Atlas. Eh! Messer Leonardo?"

The painter understood that Messer Niccolò loved Marietta passionately, but was ashamed to admit the fact.

The inn was now emptying fast; Leonardo prepared for his start and invited Machiavelli to ride with him. But Messer Niccolò shook his head, saying he must wait for money from Florence before he could pay his bill. He spoke sadly, his assumed levity having suddenly collapsed. He looked ill and wretched. Inaction, long stay in one place, was misery to him. Not without cause had the Council of Ten complained of his frequent, causeless, and unexpected removals, which were great embarrassment to their affairs.

Leonardo took him aside and offered to lend the requisite money. Machiavelli declined.

"You hurt me, my friend," said the painter; "remember this rare conjunction of the stars! You would confer a benefit upon me."

There was so much kindness in Leonardo's voice that Messer Niccolò had not the courage to persist in his refusal. He took twenty ducats which he promised to return on receipt of his money from Florence; then immediately paid his score, with the lavishness of a great noble.

VI

They started. The morning was calm and exquisite; the air, still freezing in the shade, was in the sunshine almost spring-like in its warmth. The deep blue-shadowed snow crackled under the feet of the beasts. Between the white hills shone the pale green of the winter sea, and yellow lateen sails glanced here and there like poised butterflies.

Niccolò talked, jested, and laughed. Every trifle excited him to some amusing or cynical reflection.

Passing a fishing village the travellers saw a group of fat and jolly friars on the church steps selling rosaries to the women, whose husbands and brothers stood aloof staring stupidly.

"Fools!" shouted Messer Niccolò, "know you not that fat easily goes aflame; and that holy fathers like pretty women not only to call them fathers but to make them so?"

Leonardo asked him what he had thought of Savonarola. Niccolò replied that at one time he had been Fra Girolamo's zealous partisan, hoping to find him the saviour of his country; but too soon he had begun to see the weakness of the prophet.

"The whole splenetic gang became nauseous to me," he mused. "I detest even to think of it. The devil take them!" he added energetically.

VII

About noon they rode in at the gates of Fano. The houses were alive with Cæsar's courtiers, captains, and troopers. Two rooms in the best situation had been assigned to the ducal engineer; he offered one of them to his travelling companion, who in such a crowd might have had difficulty in procuring a lodging.

Machiavelli presented himself at once at the palace, and when he returned he brought important news.

Don Ramiro de Lorqua, who had been governing in the Duke's name, had been executed. On Christmas day the people had found the headless corpse wallowing on the ground in a pool of blood, an axe beside it, the ghastly head stuck on a spear.

"The cause of the execution is unknown," said Messer Niccolò, "but 't is the talk of the whole town. Let us go together and listen to the conjectures of the rabble. 'T is an opportunity to study the natural laws of politics."

Before the old cathedral of San Fortunato a crowd was expecting the coming forth of the Duke, who was about to review his troops. Leonardo and Machiavelli joined the throng in which but one subject was being discussed.

"I can make nothing of it," said a young workman with a dull, good-natured face. "I thought Don Ramiro had been loved and enriched above all the Court."

"The very reason of his chastisement," replied a respectable shopkeeper, dressed in a squirrel pelisse; "Don Ramiro has been deceiving our Duke. He has oppressed, imprisoned, plundered the people. Before his lord he wore sheep's clothing; he fancied things hid were not things forbid. But his hour came; the sovereign's patience was exhausted, and for the good of the people he did not spare his friend; he cut off his head without trial, without hesitation, without delay, as a warning to others. Now they see how terrible is the Duke's wrath, how impartial his justice. He puts down the mighty from their seats and exalteth them of low degree."

"*Reges eos in virga ferrea*," declaimed a monk. "Thou rulest them with a rod of iron."

"Ay, ay! They need an iron rod, the sons of dogs, the oppressors of the people!"

"He knows when to pardon, and when to strike."

"We want no better sovereign."

"Truly," said a peasant, "the Lord has at last had pity on Romagna. Before, there was flaying

both of the living and of the dead and the taxes were our starvation. The last pair of oxen in our stalls had to go! But since the Duke Valentino came we have been able to breathe. May the Lord keep him in health!"

"And the judges!" said the shopkeeper; "their delay used to eat one's very heart! 'T is different now."

"He has protected the orphan and consoled the widow," put in the monk.

"He is merciful. 'T is not to be denied he is merciful to the people."

"He gives offence to none."

"O Santo Iddio!" murmured a feeble old woman, beside herself with admiration; "may the Blessed Virgin preserve to us our father, our benefactor, our bright sun!"

"Do you hear them?" whispered Machiavelli. "*Vox populi vox dei.* I have always said one must be in the plains to see the mountains; one must be among the people to know the sovereign. I 'd like to get them here, those folk who call the Duke a tyrant! These things are hid from the wise and prudent, but revealed unto the simple."

Martial music was heard and the crowd was astir.

"He comes! Look!"

They stood on tiptoe and craned their necks, curious heads were thrust from windows, women and girls, their eyes full of love, ran out on the balconies and *loggie* to see their hero, *Cesare bello e biondo*—"Cæsar, the blond and beautiful." It

was rare good luck, for he hardly ever showed himself to the people.

The musicians walked first, making a deafening clatter of kettledrums in time with the heavy tread of the soldiers. Next came the Duke's Romagnole guard, all picked and handsome men, carrying halberts three cubits long. They wore cuirasses and helmets of steel and their garments were particoloured, the right side yellow, the left red. Niccolò could not admire enough this truly Roman array. After the guard came equerries and pages, in clothes of unsurpassed splendour; camisoles of gold brocade, mantles of pounce velvet with gold-embroidered slashings, their scabbards and belts of snakes' scales, with knobs representing the seven heads of the viper vomiting poison—the cognisance of the Borgias. Embroidered on their breasts was the word, "Cæsar." They were followed by the bodyguard, Albanian *stradiotes*, with curved yataghans. Then Bartolomeo Capranica, the *Maestro del Campo*, carried the naked sword of the *Gonfaloniere* of the Roman Church. After him came the ruler of Romagna himself, Cæsar Borgia, Duke of Valentinois. He was mounted on a black Barbary stallion, with a diamond sun on its headband: he wore a pale blue silk mantle with the white lilies of France embroidered in pearls, and a corselet wrought into the gaping mouth of a lion. His helmet was a dragon, with scales, wings, and fins of wrought brass, resounding at every movement.

At this time Cæsar Borgia was six and twenty; his face had grown thin and worn since Leonardo had seen him at Louis XII.'s Court at Milan. His features were sharper, and his eyes, with their glow like polished steel, were graver and more impenetrable. His hair and pointed beard had darkened; his long nose seemed more aquiline. Complete serenity still reigned upon his impassive face; only now there was a look of still more strenuous daring, of terrifying keenness, like the edge of a bared and sharpened sword.

The Duke was followed by his artillery, the best in Italy: brass culverins, falconets, iron mortars firing stones—drawn by oxen, their heavy chariots rolling along with a dull roar and mixing with the voices of the trumpets and kettledrums. In the glow of the setting sun, cannon, cuirasses, helmets, spears, flashed lightning; Cæsar was riding in the imperial purple of a conqueror, straight towards the immense blood-red sun.

The crowd gazed at the hero in silence, holding its breath, wishing, yet fearing, to greet him with applause, in an ecstasy of admiration akin to terror. Tears flowed down the cheeks of the old beggar woman, and she murmured:

"Holy saints! Holy mother! The Lord has permitted me to see his face! Oh, our beauteous sun!"

The flashing sword entrusted to Cæsar by the Pope was the fiery glaive of the archangel Michael himself.

Leonardo smiled, seeing on Machiavelli's face the very same look of artless enthusiasm.

VIII

On reaching home Leonardo found a letter from Messer Agapito, bidding him wait on His Excellency the next day. A little later, Lucio, who was passing through Fano on his way to Ancona, came in for a visit, and Machiavelli spoke to him of the execution of Don Ramiro de Lorqua.

"To divine the real reason for the actions of a ruler like Cæsar Borgia is almost impossible," he said, "but as you ask me what I think of this deed, I will tell you. Till its conquest by the Duke, Romagna was under the yoke of a number of petty tyrants, and full of disorder, plundering, and violence. To end this state of turbulence Cæsar appointed his astute and faithful servant, Don Ramiro, as his lieutenant. This man accomplished his task; he inspired the people with a salutary terror, and established perfect tranquillity throughout the country, but he did it by a long series of cruel punishments. When the prince saw that his object was gained he determined to destroy the instrument of his severity. Don Ramiro has been seized, on the ground of extortion, and executed; his dead body lies exposed to public view. This terrible spectacle has at once gratified and awed the people. The Duke's action has been wise, for he has reaped three clear advantages.

First, he has slain the tyrants; secondly, by condemning Ramiro he has disassociated himself from his lieutenant's ferocity and so has gained a character for gentleness; thirdly, by sacrificing his favourite servant he has set an example of incorruptible equity."

Machiavelli spoke in a low dry voice, with expressionless countenance, as if stating his reasoning on some theorem.

"From your own words, Messer Niccolò," cried Lucio, "I perceive that this supposed equity is the excess of villainy!"

Sparks of fire appeared in the secretary's eyes, but he looked away and spoke as coldly as before.

"It may be so," he assented, "but what of it?"

"What of it? Would you approve such scoundrelly statecraft?"

"Young man, you speak with the inexperience of youth. In politics, the difference between the way men should and the way they do act is so great that to forget it means to expose yourself to certain ruin. For all men are by nature evil and vicious; they are virtuous only for advantage or through fear. A prince who would avoid ruin must at all hazards learn the art of appearing virtuous; and he must be or not be virtuous as the case may require. He must disregard all uneasiness of conscience as to those secret measures without which the preservation of power is impossible; for upon accurate knowledge of the nature of good and evil, it is clear that the power of a prince will

often be undermined by his virtuous actions and augmented by his crimes."

Lucio again protested. "Reasoning thus," he cried, "anything would be permissible, and there is no wickedness which you could not justify!"

"That is so," replied Machiavelli, with perfect serenity, and, as if insisting upon the significance of his words, he raised his hand and added solemnly: "All is permissible to the man who knows how to rule." Then he resumed in his former dry tone of ratiocination: "Therefore, I conclude that the severity of the Duke of Valentinois, who has put an end to pillage and violence throughout Romagna, has been more rational and no less merciful than the leniency of our Florentines, who have permitted continued revolts and have fomented disorder in all the provinces under their sway. For it is better to strike down a few than bring a whole state to ruin as result of its license."

"But," said Lucio, somewhat overwhelmed, "have there been no rulers that were strangers to this cruelty? Think of Antoninus and Marcus Aurelius."

"Do not forget, Messere, that I am discussing the government of conquered, not of hereditary principalities; and the acquisition, not the maintenance, of authority. The Emperors you have named could afford clemency, because in the preceding years there had been sufficiency of bloody deeds. The founder of Rome slew his brother—a horrid crime—but this fratricide was necessary

to the establishment of a sole authority, without which Rome would have perished from the weakness consequent on domestic strife. Who shall be able certainly to balance a single fratricide against all the virtue and wisdom of the Eternal City? Doubtless we ought to prefer the most humble fortune to greatness founded upon evil deeds; but he who has once abandoned the path of abstract righteousness must, if he would not perish, walk resolutely in the path of evil and follow it to the end: for men revenge themselves only for small offences, great offences depriving them of the power of revenge. Therefore, a prince must inflict only serious injuries on his subjects, and must refrain from minor injustices. Yet the generality persist in choosing the middle course between wrong and right, which is the most perilous. They recoil from crimes which demand great courage, and commit only vulgar baseness which profits them not."

"Your words make my hair stand on end, Messer Niccolò," said Lucio, much shocked, but thinking a jest the most courteous form of reply. "You may speak the truth, but I shall flatly refuse to believe these your real opinions."

"Truths always seem improbable," said Machiavelli dryly.

Leonardo, who was listening, had already observed that Messer Niccolò, while pretending indifference, was casting sly glances at Lucio as if to gauge the effect his words were producing. It was

evident that Machiavelli had little self-command, was not possessed of calm and conquering strength. Unwilling to think like other men, hating the commonplace, he had fallen into the opposite error, into exaggeration, into the affectation of views rare and startling, but incomplete and paradoxical. He played with such words as *virtue* and *ferocity*, much as a juggler plays with naked swords. He had a whole armoury of these polished, shining, tempting, and dangerous weapons, ready for the disabling of men like Messer Lucio: men of the herd, respectable, sensible, conventional. He punished them for their triumphant mediocrity, and for his own disregarded superiority; he cut and scratched them; but did not kill or even seriously wound them. Leonardo remembered the monster which he had once painted on the wooden *rotella* for Ser Pietro da Vinci: an animal put together from the different parts of a variety of repulsive reptiles. Had not Messer Niccolò put together as useless and impossible a monstrosity in his superhumanly astute and conscienceless prince—a being contrary to nature, fascinating as Medusa, invented for the terrifying of the vulgar? Yet under this wantonness of imagination, this artistic dispassionateness, Leonardo perceived great suffering in the soul of Messer Niccolò, as if a juggler, playing with swords, were himself cut to the quick.

"Is he not one of those unhappy sick men," thought the painter, "who seek relief from pain in envenoming their wounds?" He did not know the

last secret of this dark spirit, so like, and yet so unlike his own.

Messer Lucio, like a man in a nightmare, was struggling with the Medusa head evoked by Messer Niccolò.

"Well, well!" he said, "I will not dispute with you. Severity may have been necessary to princes in the past. We can pardon them a good deal for the sake of their heroic virtues and exploits. But, pardon me, what has this to do with the Duke of Romagna? *Quod licet Jovi non licet bovi.* What is permitted to Alexander the Great or to Julius Cæsar, may be unpardonable in Alexander the Pope or in Cæsar Borgia, of whom we cannot yet say whether he be Cæsar or nothing. I at least think, and all will agree with me——"

"Oh, of course, all will agree with you," interrupted Niccolò, out of patience, "but that is no proof, Messer Lucio. The truth does not lie on the highroad where all men pass. But to conclude the discussion, here is my last word. As I observe the acts of Cæsar, I find them perfect; and I would suggest him as a model to all who would obtain power by force of arms and by successful adventure. He combines cruelty so well with virtue, he knows so accurately when to caress and when to crush, the foundations of his power are so firmly though so quickly laid, that already he is an autocrat, the only one in Italy, perhaps the only one in Europe. It is hard to imagine what may not lie before him in the future." Machiavelli's eyes

burned, his voice shook, and red spots glowed on his sunken cheeks; he seemed like a seer. From the mask of a cynic looked out the face of the former disciple of Savonarola, the fanatic.

But Lucio, weary of the discussion, had no sooner suggested sealing a truce with two or three bottles from the neighbouring cellar than the visionary disappeared.

"Nay," cried Messer Niccolò eagerly, "let us go to a different tavern. I have a good scent in such matters, I know where we shall find handsome women."

"What, in this scurvy little town?" said Lucio.

"Listen, my lad," said the dignified secretary of the Florentine Republic, "never you despise these same small towns. In their vile alleys you can sometimes find what will make you lick your fingers for delight."

At these words Lucio slapped Messer Niccolò on the back, and called him a sly dog.

"We will take lanterns," continued Niccolò; "we will wear cloaks and vizards. On such expeditions mystery is half the pleasure. Messer Leonardo, you accompany us?"

The artist excused himself.

He did not enjoy the customary gross talk about women, and avoided it with instinctive repulsion. This man of fifty, the intrepid student of the secrets of nature, who could accompany criminals to their execution that he might see the last look of terror in their eyes, was often put out of countenance by a

jest, did not know which way to look, and blushed like a schoolboy.

Niccolò, without more ado, carried off Messer Lucio.

IX

Early next day a chamberlain came to inquire whether the ducal engineer were satisfied with his quarters, and to bring him a present from Cæsar. According to the hospitable custom of the time it consisted of provisions, a sack of flour, a cask of wine, a sheep, a dozen fat capons; and also two large torches, three packets of wax candles, and two boxes of *confetti*. Impressed by these compliments, Machiavelli begged Leonardo to say a word for him to the Duke, and obtain him the favour of an interview. At eleven in the evening, Cæsar's customary reception-hour, they went together to the palace.

The Duke's manner of life was strange enough. Summer and winter he went to bed at four or five in the morning, so that for him it was dawn at three in the afternoon, sunrise at four; at five he began to dress and to dine and to conduct his business affairs all simultaneously. He surrounded his doings with mystery, not only out of natural secretiveness, but by studied calculation; he seldom left his palace, and always masked. Only on great festivals did he show himself to the people, and to the troops only in moments of extreme danger.

He liked to astonish; his appearances were always dramatic, like those of a demigod.

Scarce credible reports were current as to his profuseness. All the gold continually flowing into the treasury of St. Peter's did not suffice for the expenditure of the *Gonfaloniere* of the Church. Envoys reported that he spent not less than eighteen hundred ducats daily; and that when he rode through the streets crowds followed him to pick up the easily dropped silver shoes, with which his horses were shod, solely as largesse to the people. Wonders were told also as to his physical strength. He could bend horse-shoes in his fingers (thin and delicate as a woman's), twist iron rods, break the cables of ships. At a bull-fight in Rome some years ago, when he had been Cardinal of Valenza, the youthful Cæsar had cut a bull in half with a single stroke of his sword. Inaccessible to his courtiers and to the ambassadors of great potentates, he was often to be seen on the hills round Cesena watching the boxing matches of the wild Romagna herdsmen, and sometimes taking part in the sport.

At the same time he was the ideal of a cavalier and the paragon of fashion. On the day of his sister Lucrezia's marriage with Alfonso d'Este, he left the siege of a fortress and rode from the camp to the wedding, unrecognised, and clad in black velvet, with a black mask. He passed through the crowd of guests, bowed, and when all drew back in surprise, danced to the strains of the music with

such grace that at once the cry was raised, "*Cesare! Cesare! L'unico Cesare!*"

Heeding neither guests nor bridegroom, he drew Lucrezia aside and whispered in her ear. Her eyes fell, she flushed, then grew white, to the enhancement of her dainty pearl-like beauty. It might be she was innocent; there was no question that she was frail; report added submissive, perhaps even criminally submissive, to the terrible will of this her brother.

He, it seemed, cared for one point only, that there should be no proofs. Fame probably exaggerated his sins; but possibly the reality was more terrible than fame. At any rate he knew how to conceal his actions, and to wipe out every trace of them.

X

The old Gothic municipal palace of Fano served as the Duke's residence. Leonardo and Machiavelli crossed the dreary hall where less important visitors were received, and entered an inner apartment, once a chapel. There was stained glass in the lancet windows; and the Apostles and Fathers of the Church were carved in oak on the high stalls of the choir. On the ceiling was a faded fresco of the Holy Dove hovering over clouds and angels. The courtiers were standing and talking in undertones, for the near presence of the sovereign was felt even through the walls. The ill-starred envoy

Alfonso d'Este (Dossi, Modena).

Photo by Alinari.

from Rimini, a bald and feeble old man who had been waiting three months for this audience of the Duke, clearly worn out by many sleepless nights, had fallen into a doze. Now and then the door opened, and the secretary Agapito, with an anxious air, spectacles on nose and pen behind his ear, looked in, and summoned to His Highness one or the other of those waiting. Each time, the bald old man from Rimini shuddered, started up, saw it was not his turn, sighed heavily, and again sank into his doze. His slumbers were soothed by the sound of an apothecary's pestle beating in a mortar; for, a suitable room being lacking, this chapel was used not only as the ante-chamber to the presence but also as the surgery. Where the altar had stood was a table crowded with the bottles, gallipots, and retorts of a physician's laboratory, and behind it Gaspare Torella, the Bishop of Santa Giusta, and the chief physician to the Duke of Valentinois, was preparing a fashionable medicine, a decoction of "*guaiaco*," or, as it was commonly called, "Holy tree," brought from the new islands discovered by Columbus. The bishop-doctor, while he rubbed the yellow lumps in his shapely hands, was discoursing on the nature of this healing tree; and the oaken saints on the stalls seemed listening in amazement to the strange talk of these new shepherds of the Lord's flock. The chapel was lighted only by the physician's blinking lamp; the air was choked by the pungent smell of the medicine, mingled with faint perfume of the incense of earlier years;

one might have fancied this an assembly of prelates engaged in the performance of some strange mystic rite. Meantime the Florentine secretary was taking now one, now another of the courtiers aside, and adroitly questioning them as to Cæsar's policy. Presently he approached Leonardo and whispered to him very mysteriously:

"I shall eat the artichoke; I shall eat the artichoke!"

"What artichoke?" asked the painter, bewildered.

"Precisely; what artichoke? It seems the Duke propounded a riddle to Messer Pandolfo Collenuccio, the Ambassador from Ferrara. He said, 'I shall eat the artichoke, leaf by leaf.' It may signify the league of his enemies whom he means to separate, and so destroy one by one. I have puzzled my brains over it for an hour." Speaking still lower, he continued: "Here all is riddle and trap. They chatter about every kind of nonsense, but directly you speak of affairs they become dumb as monks at dinner. But they shall not deceive me; I know very well there is something in the air. I' faith, sir, I would sell my soul to know what."

And his eyes glowed like a desperate gamester's. Before Leonardo could reply, he was summoned by Messer Agapito. Through a long gloomy passage guarded by the *stradiotes*, Leonardo arrived at the Duke's bedchamber, a spacious room hung with tapestry and silk. On the ceiling were painted the amours of Pasiphaë and the bull. The bull, the

heraldic emblem of the Borgias, was repeated on all the ornaments of the room, together with the triple tiara and the keys of St. Peter. The room was warm and scented. A fire of juniper burned on the marble hearth, and the lamp oil was perfumed with violets. Cæsar, elegantly dressed, lay on a flat couch in the middle of the room; he cared for two postures only—reclining, or sitting on horseback. Apparently indifferent to everything, he leaned his elbow on a pillow, listened to a report from a secretary, and watched a game of chess which two of his attendants were playing on a jasper table by his side. He had the faculty of divided attention. With a slow, uniform, mechanical movement he passed backward and forward from one hand to the other a golden ball filled with scent, which he carried as religiously as his Damascene dagger.

XI

He received Leonardo with a peculiar and charming courtesy. Not permitting him to kneel, he held his hand and made him sit in an arm-chair by his side. The Duke wished to consult him about plans tendered by Bramante for a new monastery at the town of Imola, which was to be called Valentino, and to have a superb chapel, a hospital, and a refuge for pilgrims. By such munificent works of charity he wished to erect a monument to his own Christian beneficence. After Bramante's designs, he exhibited letters just cut for Girolamo

Soncino's new printing-press at Fano, being zealous in the encouragement of the arts and sciences in his dominions. Agapito then gave his master a collection of eulogistic odes by Francesco Uberti, the Court poet; these Cæsar received graciously, commanding a liberal reward for the author. Then as he insisted upon seeing satires no less than eulogies, the secretary handed him a poem by Mancioni the Neapolitan, who had been seized and confined in the Castle of St. Angelo in Rome. This sonnet was full of savage abuse; in it Cæsar was called a mule, the mongrel offspring of a harlot and a pope, sitting on a throne, once Christ's, now Satan's; a circumcised Turk, a disfrocked cardinal, incestuous, apostate, fratricidal.

"Why, O God, waitest thou?" cried the poet; "carest thou not that Holy Church has become a stall for mules, a den of orgies?"

"How does Your Excellency wish the villain to be dealt with?" asked Agapito.

"Leave him till my return," replied the Duke, quietly; "I will deal with him myself. I shall know how to teach these scribblers manners!" he added, in a low voice.

Cæsar's method of teaching manners was not unknown. For less serious affronts he had cut off hands, and seared tongues with red-hot irons. His report finished, the secretary withdrew. Then audience was given to Valguglio, the astrologer, who had drawn a new horoscope. The Duke listened attentively, for he was a believer in the

influences of the stars. Valguglio explained that Cæsar's late illness was due to the entrance of Mars into the sign of the Scorpion; the complaint would pass when Venus had reached her rising in Taurus. Had the Duke any matter of importance in hand, let him choose for its date the afternoon of the 31st of December, as the conjunction of stars that day was propitious; and bending toward the Duke's ear and raising his finger impressively, the astrologer repeated thrice in a mysterious whisper:

"*Fatilo! Fatilo! Fatilo!*"—"Do it! Do it! Do it!"

Cæsar made no reply, but it seemed to Leonardo that a shadow passed over his face. Then he dismissed the seer and turned again to the *Ingegnere Ducale.*

Leonardo unfolded military plans and maps. Not merely scientific, showing the nature of the soil, the direction of the watersheds, the mountains, the windings of the rivers—they were also artistic bird's-eye pictures of the localities, coloured after nature, and with every detail executed in perfection. Squares, streets, and towers of the towns could be recognised; the spectator felt as if flying over the earth, and seeing at his feet an infinite expanse. Cæsar examined with great attention the topography of the district bounded on the south by the lake of Bolsena, on the north by the Val d'Ema, on the east by Arezzo and Perugia, on the west by Siena and the littoral. This was the heart of Italy, Leonardo's home, the territory of Florence, long coveted by the Duke. Immersed

in thought, enjoying this fancied flight, Cæsar gazed long at Leonardo's drawing, and felt as if he and the great inventor were in such sort engaged in the same work. He raised his eyes to the artist and cordially pressed his hand.

"I thank you, my Leonardo. Continue to serve me thus and I shall know how to reward you. Are you comfortable among us?" he continued, solicitously. "Are you satisfied with your salary? Have you any request to make? You know my pleasure in gratifying you."

Leonardo, profiting by the opportunity, asked an audience for Messer Niccolò. Cæsar shrugged his shoulders with a good-humoured smile.

"He is a strange man, your Messer Niccolò. He demands audience, and, when I receive him, talks about nothing at all. Why did they send me such a mysterious person?" Presently he asked Leonardo's opinion of the man.

"I find him, Excellence, one of the most astute and most clear-sighted persons I have met in my whole life."

"He is certainly intelligent," said the Duke, "and I doubt not he has understanding of affairs. And yet—he is unreliable. He knows no mean in anything. However—I wish him well, especially since he has your good word. He is guileless, though he thinks himself the most cunning of men, and would deceive me, whom he considers the enemy of your republic. I pardon him, understanding that he loves his country better than his

soul. Well, I will receive him; tell him so. By the way, have I not heard he is compiling a book on Statecraft and the Art of War?"

Cæsar laughed his low pleasant laugh, as if reminded of something which had tickled him.

"Have you heard about the Macedonian phalanx? No? Then listen. Once, Messer Niccolò explained from this very book on war to my Master of the Camp, Bartolomeo Capranica, and other captains, the laws of ranging troops after the manner of the phalanx. He spoke with such eloquence that all desired to see the phalanx in actual fact. We went to a suitable field and Niccolò was to give orders. Well, he wrestled with two thousand soldiers for nearly three hours, exposing them to the cold, the wind, the rain, but he could not form his own phalanx. At last Bartolomeo lost patience; he had never read a military book in his life, but he took the troop in hand, and in the twinkling of an eye he had drawn up the infantry in the desired order. There we see the difference between practice and theory. But take care how you allude to it! Messer Niccolò does not like to be reminded of anything Macedonian!"

By this time it was three o'clock and the Duke's supper was brought, a dish of fruit, trout, and some white wine; like a true Spaniard he ate and drank most sparingly. Leonardo was dismissed, but not before Cæsar had again thanked him for the maps. Three pages carrying torches were detailed to escort him to his lodging.

The painter told Machiavelli about his interview with the Duke. When he spoke of the maps of the Florentine territory Messer Niccolò grew thoughtful.

"What? You? A citizen of our republic, for our bitterest enemy? Do you know, sir, that for this you may be accused of treason?"

"Really?" said Leonardo, astonished. "I don't wish to think so, Niccolò. I am no politician, but obey like a blind man."

Silently they looked into each other's eyes; and each recognised the profound difference between them. The one might be said to have no country; the other loved his country, in Cæsar's phrase, "above his own soul."

XII

That night Niccolò went away, leaving no word as to the Whither and the Why.

He returned next day, weary and frozen, entered Leonardo's room, bolted the door, and announced that he wished to speak on a matter of profoundest secrecy. Then he began a narrative.

Three years ago, one winter evening, in a deserted corner of Romagna between Cervia and Porto Cesenatico, a body of cavalry was escorting Madonna Dorotea, wife of Battista Caracciolo, captain of infantry in the service of the *Serenissima Signoria* of Venice, and her cousin, Maria, a fifteen-year-old novice in an Urbino convent, from

Urbino to Venice. Horsemen armed and masked fell on the party, seized the ladies, put them on horses, and carried them off. From that day they had not been heard of. The Council and Senate of Venice, considering themselves outraged in the person of their captain, appealed to Louis XII., to the King of Spain, and to the Pope, openly accusing the Duke of Romagna of the abduction of Dorotea. However, they could not prove their case, and Cæsar replied mockingly that, having no lack of women, he had not occasion to steal them by highway robbery. Reports began to be current, moreover, that Dorotea had quickly consoled herself, and that, having forgotten her husband, she followed the Duke in all his campaigns.

Maria, however, had a brother, Messer Dionigi, a young captain in the service of Florence. When all the complaints of the Florentine Signoria, before whom he had laid the matter, proved as vain as the representations of the Venetians, Dionigi determined to act on his own authority. He presented himself before the Duke under a feigned name, gained his confidence, obtained admission to the dungeon of the Castle of Cesena, found his sister, disguised her as a boy, and made his escape with her. But at the Perugian frontier the fugitives were overtaken, Dionigi was killed, and Maria haled back to her prison.

Machiavelli, as Secretary of the Florentine Republic, was interested in the event. He had been in Dionigi's confidence, and had learned from him

not only the plan of rescue, but the accounts which the brother had acquired of his sister's ill-fortune, and of her reputation as a miracle-working saint, bearing the "stigmata" like St. Catherine of Siena.

Cæsar, tired of Dorotea, had cast his eyes on Maria, and having never experienced difficulty with women, not even with the most discreet, counted on an easy conquest. He was mistaken. The girl met him with a resistance which he could not overcome. Report said that of late the Duke had constantly visited her in her cell, staying for long periods alone with her. But what passed at these interviews no one knew.

Machiavelli ended his recital with expression of a fixed determination to rescue Maria.

"If you, Messer Leonardo, will consent to help me, I will so arrange the matter that none shall know of your share in it. First, I shall require of you information as to the internal construction and arrangement of the Castle of San Michele, where Maria is kept in durance. You, as the Court engineer, will find it easy to obtain entrance and to discover all we need to know."

Leonardo for all reply gazed at his friend in amazement, and presently Messer Niccolò broke into a forced and somewhat angry laugh.

"I hope," he said, "you do not honour me by thinking me over-sentimental, too chivalrously generous? Whether Cæsar seduce this minx or no is nothing to me. Would you know why I

concern myself in the affair? First, to show the illustrious Signoria that I am good for something besides foolery; but secondly and chiefly, because I require amusement. If a man commit no follies he loses his wits through weariness. I am sick of chattering, playing dice, going to bawdy houses, and making vain reports to the Florentine Woolstaplers. So I have devised this adventure; action I assure you, not mere talk. The opportunity must not be wasted. My whole plan is ready and I have taken all necessary precautions."

He spoke hurriedly as if excusing himself. Leonardo, however, understood that he was ashamed of genuine kind-heartedness, and was trying to conceal it under a mask of cynicism.

"Messere," said the artist, "I pray you to rely on me in this matter as on yourself. But on one condition, that, if we fail, I shall share your responsibility."

Niccolò, visibly touched, clasped his hand, and at once set forth his design. Leonardo made no criticism, though in his heart he doubted whether it would prove practical. The liberation of the captive was fixed for the 30th of December.

Two days before the date agreed upon, one of Maria's gaolers, who was in Niccolò's pay, came running to inform him that Cæsar knew all. Machiavelli being absent, Leonardo went in search of him to give him this news. He found the Florentine Secretary in a tavern, where a troop of gamesters, chiefly Spanish soldiers, were fleecing in-

expert players at dice or cards. Surrounded by a merry group of young libertines, Machiavelli was expounding that famous sonnet of Petrarch's on Laura, which ends:

"E lei vid' io ferita in mezzo 'l core,"

and discovering some obscene allusion in every line, while his hearers were convulsed with laughter.

Suddenly an uproar arose in the next room; women screamed, tables were overthrown, swords clashed, coins and broken bottles were dashed against the walls and floor. One of the players had been detected cheating. Niccolò's audience ran to join the fray, and Leonardo whispered his news to his friend and led him home.

It was a still, starlit night. New fallen snow creaked under their feet; the fragrance of the air was delicious after the stifling tavern. When Messer Niccolò heard that their plot for the rescue of the girl Maria had come to the knowledge of the Duke, he replied coolly that for the moment there was no occasion for alarm. Then he continued with voluble apology:

"You were surprised to find me acting cheap jack to that Spanish rabble? What of it? 'T is law of necessity. Necessity jumps, Necessity dances, Necessity trolls catches. They may be rascals, but they are more generous than the magnificent Signoria of Florence."

There was so much bitterness and self-accusation in his tone that Leonardo could not bear it.

"You are wrong, Messer Niccolò," he said, "to speak thus with me. I am your friend and shall not judge like the vulgar."

Machiavelli turned away—and answered in a low voice: "I know it—judge me not harshly, Leonardo. Often I jest and laugh lest my heart's grief should set me weeping. Such is my lot! I was born under a luckless star. While my fellows, men of no intelligence, succeed in everything, live in honour and luxury, acquire power and wealth, I remain behind them all, out-jostled by fools. They think me a buffoon, perchance they be right. Yet I fear neither great labours nor certain perils; but what I cannot suffer is that my life should be consumed in the pitiful effort to make two ends meet, to tremble over every groat, to endure paltry affronts daily from my inferiors! 'T is an accursed life! If God do not come to my aid, I shall end by abandoning my work, my Marietta, and my son. What am I but a burden to them and to all? Let them think what they will; let them imagine me dead. I will hide me in some distant hamlet. some corner of the earth where none shall know me; where I shall be clerk to the *podestà*, or teacher of the alphabet in a village school, that I may not die of starvation so long as I retain my senses. My friend, there is naught more terrible than to feel in yourself the power to do something, and to know that you will perish and die without ever having accomplished anything whatsoever."

XIII

As the day for the adventure approached, Leonardo perceived that Machiavelli, notwithstanding his anticipations of success, was losing his coolness, and becoming inclined either to undue caution or to over precipitancy. The artist knew well this state of mind: the result, not of cowardice nor of pusillanimity, but of that treachery of the will, that fatal irresolution when the moment for striking has arrived, which is inherent in men made for contemplation rather than for action.

On the eve of the eventful day Niccolò went to a little place near the Torre di San Michele, to make the final preparations. Leonardo was to join him early in the morning. Left alone, the latter momentarily expected disastrous news; he felt very little doubt that the affair would end in some stupid failure, on a par with the prank of a schoolboy.

The dull winter morning was dawning, and he was about to make his start when Niccolò returned. Pale and woe-begone, he sank half-fainting on a chair.

"'T is at an end," he said shortly.

"I expected as much!" cried Leonardo. "I guessed we should fail."

"We have not failed, but we are too late; the bird has flown."

"How has she flown?"

"This morning, before the dawn, Maria was found on the prison floor with her throat cut."

"And the murderer is——?"

"The murderer is unknown, but it is not the Duke. Cæsar and his executioners are no bunglers, and this poor child has been hacked— They say she has died a maid. My notion is that she herself——"

"Impossible! She would not have done it. She was a saint——"

"Anything is possible. You don't know this crew yet. And that infamous assassin—I tell you that infamous assassin is capable of anything! He could force even a saint to lay hands on herself! Ah! I saw her twice in the beginning of her martyrdom, when she was not so closely watched. She was fragile, with an innocent face like a child's. Her hair was thin and of pale gold, like Lippo Lippi's Madonna in the Badia. There was no special beauty about her. Oh, Messer Leonardo, you cannot know what a sweet, helpless child she was!"

He turned away, tears glistening on his eyelashes. But he continued in a sharp, forced voice:

"I have always said it! An honourable man in this Court is like a fish in a frying-pan. I have had enough of it! I was not made to be a slave. The Signoria must transfer me. I won't stay here."

Leonardo was sincerely grieved for Maria, and he would have done his utmost on her behalf. Nevertheless it was a relief both to him and to Messer Niccolò that there was no longer any demand upon them for decisive action.

XIV

The larger part of Cæsar's army marched out of Fano at dawn on the 30th of December, and encamped outside Sinigaglia. Next day (the date recommended by the astrologer), the Duke himself was to arrive. Sinigaglia had been besieged by the confederates of Mugione, who had come to terms with Cæsar, and were now acting for him. The town had surrendered, but the commandant of the castle swore he would open his gates only to Cæsar in person. Accordingly the Duke had sent word that he was coming, and he had invited the repentant confederates to meet him on the banks of the Metauro, where his camp lay, that they might hold a council of war. These men, his former enemies, now his allies, had perhaps a presentiment of evil, and would have declined to meet him. However, he reassured them, "bewitching them," as Machiavelli afterwards wrote, "like the basilisk which entices its victims by the sweetness of its singing."

Machiavelli left Fano with the Duke. Leonardo followed alone some hours later.

The road led southwards along the seashore. On the right, mountains descended sheer to the sea, scarcely allowing room for the narrow road at their base. It was a grey day, very still; the water was grey and unruffled as the sky. The drowsy air, the chirping of the birds, black spots and holes in the surface of the snow, all portended a thaw.

At last the brick towers of Sinigaglia came in

Madonna in the Badia (Lippo Lippi, Florence).

Photo by Anderson.

sight; the town lay like a trap between the mountains and the sea, not a mile from the Adriatic, not a cross-bow-shot from the foot of the Apennines. Upon meeting the stream of the Misa, the road turned sharply to the left; here was a bridge slanting across the little river, and behind it the gates of the town frowned across a square with low buildings, chiefly store-houses belonging to Venetian merchants. At that time Sinigaglia was a large semi-Oriental bazaar, where Italian traders exchanged their wares with Turks, Armenians, Greeks, Persians, and Slavs from Montenegro and Albania. At this moment, however, even the busiest streets were empty. Leonardo met only soldiers. Here and there in the long arcades, which extended monotonously along each side of the street, in the shops, the warehouses, the *fondachi*, he saw traces of plunder—broken glass, forced locks, several bolts and bars, doors thrown open, and wares and bales ruthlessly exposed. There was a smell of fire, and some half-consumed houses were still smoking; corpses hung from the iron lamp-stanchions at the corners of the palace.

It was growing dark when, in the principal piazza near the palace, Leonardo saw Cæsar Borgia surrounded by his guards. He was punishing the soldiers who had pillaged the town. Messer Agapito was in the act of reading their sentences; then at a sign from the Duke the condemned were conducted to the gallows. At this moment Leonardo was joined by Machiavelli.

"What do you think of it?" asked Messer Niccolò eagerly, "if indeed you have heard——"

"I have heard nothing, and am glad to meet you. Pray tell me."

Machiavelli took him into the next street, then through several narrow lanes, choked with snow, to a deserted district by the shore. Here in a lonely tumble-down hovel, belonging to the widow of a shipbuilder, he had succeeded in finding the only vacant quarters in the town, two diminutive rooms for himself and his friend. He lit a candle, drew a bottle of wine from his pocket, broke its neck against the wall, and seated himself opposite Leonardo, gazing at him with glowing eyes.

"You have not heard?" he said gravely. "A rare and memorable thing has been done. Cæsar has revenged himself on his enemies. The conspirators have been seized; Oliverotto, Orsini, and Vitelli are awaiting sentence of death." He threw himself back in his chair, watching Leonardo, and enjoying his astonishment. Then making an effort to appear calm and dispassionate, he told the story of the trap of Sinigaglia.

Arriving early at the camp on the Metauro, Cæsar sent forward two hundred horsemen, set the infantry in motion, and followed them himself with the rest of the cavalry. He knew that the allied generals would come to meet him, and that their forces had been distributed in the forts surrounding the town, so as to make room for the new troops. Outside the gates where the road curved, following

the bank of the Misa, he drew up his cavalry in two lines, leaving space between them for the passage of the infantry, which, without a halt, crossed the bridge and entered the gates of the town.

The allies, Orsini, Gravina, and Vitellozzo, rode out to meet the Duke, escorted by a few horsemen. As if presaging disaster, Vitellozzo was so gloomy and abstracted that those about him who knew his customary phlegm were astounded; it was known that he had taken leave of his family as if going to his death. The generals dismounted from their mules and saluted the Duke. He also left his horse, gave his hand to each, and then embraced and kissed them, calling them his "beloved brothers," with many demonstrations of courtesy. According to a preconcerted arrangement, Cæsar's captains surrounded the generals in such a way that each was the centre of a group of Borgia's adherents; meantime the Duke, observing the absence of Oliverotto, signed to Don Michele Corella, his captain, who rode off, and having found Oliverotto with his troops, made a pretext for bringing him also to Cæsar's presence. Then, conversing amicably on military matters and future tactics, they went all together to the palace, which stood just in front of the fortress.

At the entrance the generals would have taken their leave, but the Duke, with the same urbanity as before, invited them into the palace.

Scarcely had they set foot in the first chamber, when the doors were secured, armed men rushed

on the four generals, seized, disarmed, and bound them. Such was their astonishment that they scarce offered any resistance. The Duke intended to disembarrass himself of his victims that very night by strangling them in a secluded part of the palace.

"Truly, Messer Leonardo," cried Machiavelli, "I would you had seen how he embraced them and kissed them! One mistrustful glance, one suspicious gesture might have betrayed him; but there was such sincerity in his voice, on his countenance, that till the final moment I guessed naught, nor could have believed he was acting a part. Of all stratagems since politics began, this must be the finest!"

Leonardo smiled. "Doubtless," he said, "His Excellency has exhibited audacity and craft; but I comprehend not what in this betrayal so moves your admiration."

"Betrayal? Nay, sir, when it is a question of saving your country, there can be no question of betrayal or of loyalty, of good or evil, of clemency or cruelty. All means are alike, provided the object is gained."

"Is this a question of saving his country? Methinks the Duke has studied but his own advantage.

"Can it be that even you do not understand? Cæsar is the future autocrat of united Italy. Never was a time more favourable for the advent of a hero. If Israel had to serve in bondage in order that Moses should arise; if the Persians had to lie under the

yoke of the Medes that Cyrus might be exalted; if the Athenians had to waste themselves in internecine strife that Theseus might have eternal glory, then it is necessary also, in this our own day, that Italy be shamed, and enslaved, bound, and divided, without a head, without a leader, without a guide; devastated, trampled on, crushed by all the woes which a nation can endure, in order that a new hero shall rise to be saviour of his land. Many times men have appeared whom she has fancied the destined one, and have died leaving the great deed undone. Half-dead, scarce breathing, she still awaits her deliverer, who shall heal her wounds, put an end to disorder in Lombardy, plunder in Tuscany, extortion and murder in Naples. Day and night Italy cries to her God, if, perchance, He will send her a saviour!"

His voice rang like a cord too tightly stretched, and broke. He was white and shaking, and his eyes glowed. In his excitement was something convulsive, powerless, akin to epilepsy.

Leonardo remembered how, speaking of Maria's suicide, he had called the Duke of Valentinois a monster of crime. He did not point out the inconsistency, knowing that Messer Niccolò, in his exaltation, would repudiate his softer mood.

"Who lives long, sees much, *Niccolò mio*. But permit me one question. Why is it *to-day* that you have assured yourself of Cæsar's divine election? Has the *inganno di Sinigaglia* proved his heroism?"

"Yes," replied Machiavelli, recovering his impartial air; "the violence of his action has shown that he has the rare combination of great qualities and their opposites. I do not blame. I do not praise. I simply examine. Here is my reasoning on the matter: there are two ways open to him who would arrive at a particular end. The first is law, the second violence. The first belongs to men—the second to beasts. He who wishes to rule must tread both ways, must know how to be either beast or man. Such is the inner meaning of the old legends of Achilles and other heroes nurtured by Chiron, the centaur, half-god, half-beast. The major part of men cannot support the weight of liberty, and fear it more than death. When they have committed a crime they are crushed under the burden of repentance. 'T is only the hero, the man of destiny, who has the strength to support liberty, who breaks laws without fear, without remorse, who remains innocent even in evil, as do beasts and gods. To-day, for the first time, I have seen in Cæsar the infallible sign that he is elect of God!"

"Yes, yes, I understand," said Leonardo moodily, "but to my thinking that man is not free who, like Cæsar, dares all because he knows naught and loves naught. *I call him free who dares all because he knows all and loves all.* That is the liberty whereby men shall conquer both good and evil, the height and the abyss, the bounds of earth, its obstacles and burdens; shall become as gods, and fly."

"Fly?" said Machiavelli, bewildered.

"When they have perfect knowledge they will make themselves wings. 'T is a subject upon which I have thought much. Perhaps nothing will come of it. I care not; if it be not I, 't will be another. The day will come when there shall be wings."

"Well, let us congratulate each other. Our talk has led us to a new creation. My prince is to be half-god, half-beast; and you have given him wings."

But the striking of a clock in the neighbouring tower drove Messer Niccolò forth; he had to hasten to the palace that he might learn of the impending execution of the generals.

Isabella Gonzaga, Marchesa of Mantua, by way of congratulation, sent Cesare a carnival gift of a hundred pretty masks in coloured silk.

XV

Cæsar returned to Rome in the beginning of March, 1503. The Pope proposed to reward the hero with the Golden Rose, the highest distinction which the Church could confer on her champions. The cardinals assented, and two days later the ceremony of investiture took place. The Roman Curia and the envoys of the great powers assembled in the Sala de' Pontefici, which looks out on the Cortile del Belvedere. Alexander VI., seventy years of age and corpulent, but still vigorous and

majestic, ascended the dais, wearing the begemmed mantle and triple crown, the ostrich fans waving over his head.

Trumpets blared, and at a signal from Johann Borckhart, Master of Ceremonies, the armour-bearers, pages, couriers, and guards of the Duke of Romagna entered the hall, accompanied by Bartolomeo Capranica, his Master of the Camp, bearing the naked sword of the *Gonfaloniere* of the Roman Church. The sword was gilded and damascened with delicate designs. First, the Goddess of Fidelity seated on a throne, with the legend, "Fidelity is stronger than Arms." Secondly, Julius Cæsar in his triumphal car, with the legend, "*Aut Cæsar aut Nihil.*" Thirdly, the passage of the Rubicon, with the legend, "The die is cast." Lastly, a sacrifice to the Bull of the House of Borgia —naked priestesses burning incense over a human victim, and on the altar the inscription, "*Deo optimo maximo Hostia,*" and lower, "*In nomine Cæsaris omen.*" The human sacrifice to the beast acquired a more terrible meaning from the fact that these engravings and mottoes had been ordered at the moment when Cæsar was contemplating the murder of his brother Giovanni, in order to take from him this sword of the standard-bearer of the Church.

Following the insignia of his office came the hero himself, crowned with the lofty ducal *berretta*, embroidered in pearls with the Holy Dove. He approached the Pope, removed the *berretta*, knelt and

kissed the ruby cross on the shoe of the Pontifex Maximus. Cardinal Monreale handed the Golden Rose to His Holiness. It was a marvel of the jeweller's art; from a phial concealed under the gold filigree petals exhaled the perfume of innumerable roses. The Pope stood, and in a voice quivering with emotion uttered the words:

"Receive, most beloved son, this rose, symbol of the joy of the two Jerusalems, earthly and heavenly, of the two churches, militant and triumphant; the incorruptible flower, the delight of the saints, the beauty of imperishable crowns. May thy virtue flower in Christ as this rose, which blossoms on the shore of many waters! Amen."

Cæsar received the mystic rose from the paternal hands.

It was more than the old man could bear. To the disgust of Burckhardt, the stolid German master of the ceremonies, he broke through the prescribed ceremonial; bending over his son he stretched out his trembling hands, his face contracting and his shoulders shaking as he murmured:

"Cesare! Cesare! *figlio mio!*"

The Duke handed the rose to the Cardinal di San Clemente, and the Pope embraced him in a frenzy of joy, laughing and weeping.

Again the trumpets blared, the great bell of St. Peter's pealed, and was answered by the bells of all the churches in the city, and by salvoes of artillery from the Castle of St. Angelo. In the Cortile del Belvedere the Romagnole guard shouted:

"Viva Cesare! Viva Cesare!"

And the Duke came out on the balcony to greet his troops. Under the blue sky, in the brilliance of the morning sun, his vesture gold and purple, the Dove of the Holy Spirit on his head, the mystic rose in his hand, to the people he was not a man, but a god.

XVI

That night there was a splendid masked procession: the triumph of Julius Cæsar as it was shown on the sword of the Duke of Valentinois and Romagna. He himself took his seat in the chariot bearing the inscription "Cæsar the divine"; his head was crowned with laurel, and he carried a palm-branch in his hand. The chariot was surrounded by his soldiers, dressed as Roman legionaries, with eagles and javelins. All was correctly ordered in accordance with descriptions in books and representations on monuments and medals.

Before the chariot walked a man in the long white robe of an Egyptian hierophant, carrying a banner with the Borgia Bull, purple and gilded; the bloody Apis, protecting god of Alexander VI. Boys in cloth of silver sang to the clashing of timbrels:

"Vive diu Bos! Vive diu Bos! Borgia vive!" Glory to the Bull! Glory to the Bull! Glory to Borgia!" And high above the crowd, lighted by the flare of torches, swung the image of the beast, fiery as the rising sun.

In the crowd was Leonardo's pupil, Giovanni Boltraffio, who had newly arrived from Florence. Looking at the purple beast he remembered the words in the Apocalypse:

"And they worshipped the Beast, saying, Who is like unto the Beast? who is able to make war with him?

"And I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And upon her forehead was a name written—'MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.'"

Like the Seer of Patmos, Giovanni "wondered with a great wonder."

BOOK XIII

THE PURPLE BEAST—1503

"The beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit."—REV. xi. 7.

I

LEONARDO was threatened with a lawsuit touching his vineyard at Fiesole, a slice of which was coveted by the neighbouring *contadino*. He had entrusted the matter to Giovanni Boltraffio; and wishing to speak to him, had sent for him to Rome. On his way, Giovanni visited Orvieto to see the famous frescoes lately painted by Luca Signorelli in the Cappella Nuova of the cathedral. One of these frescoes showed the coming of Antichrist.

Giovanni was greatly impressed by the countenance of the enemy of God. It was not evil; it was only a face of infinite grief. In the clear eyes, with their troubled gentleness, was reflected the final remorse of the wisdom which has renounced its God. The figure was beautiful, notwithstanding the satyr ears, the claw-like fingers. And, as occurs sometimes in delirium, Giovanni saw behind this face Another terribly

like it, a divine face, which he dared not own he recognised.

In the same picture, at the left, was seen the fall of Antichrist. Soaring upward on invisible wings, assuming the character of the Son of Man coming in the clouds to judge the quick and the dead, he was hurled back, down to the pit by the Archangel. These human wings, this failing flight, reawakened in Giovanni the old appalling doubts about Leonardo, his master.

There were two other persons in the chapel with Giovanni also looking at the frescoes: a stout monk, and a long lean man of uncertain age with a keen hungry face, in the garb of a "goliard," as the itinerant scholars of the middle ages were called. They made friends with Giovanni, and the three continued their journey in company. The monk was a German, Tomaso Schweinitz, the librarian of an Augustinian monastery at Nuremberg; he was going to Rome about certain disputed benefices. His companion was also German, Hans Platter, from Salzburg; he was acting partly as Schweinitz's secretary, partly as his jester, partly as his groom. On the journey the three discussed ecclesiastical affairs. Calmly and with scientific acumen, Schweinitz demonstrated the absurdity of imputing infallibility to the Pope, and prophesied that within twenty years Germany would shake off the intolerable yoke of the Romish Church.

"This man will never die for his creed," thought

Giovanni, looking at the full-fed round face of the Nuremberg monk; "he will not face the fire like Savonarola; yet, who knows? he may be more dangerous to the Church."

One evening soon after their arrival in Rome, Giovanni met Hans Platter in the square of St. Peter's, and the German took him to the neighbouring Vicolo de' Sinibaldi, where among a number of foreign taverns was a small wine-cellar with the sign of the Silver Hedgehog. Its host was a Czech of the Hussite heresy, Yan Khromy, who entertained with his choicest wines all free-thinkers or enemies of the papacy—such were indeed daily increasing, and preparing the way for the great reformation of the Church.

In an inner room, where only the elect were admitted, was a fairly numerous company; and at the head of the table sat Schweinitz, leaning back against a cask, his fat hands resting on his paunch, his face bloated and stupid. Now and then he raised his glass level with the candle-flame admiring the pale gold of the Rhenish; apparently he had already drunk more than enough.

Fra Martino, a violent little monk, was pouring out vials of wrath against the extortions of the Curia Romana:

"Better to fall into the hands of brigands than of the prelates here! Daily pillage! Give to the Penitenziere, to the Protonotary, to the Cubiculary, to the door-keeper, to the groom, to

The Fall of Antichrist (Luca Signorelli).

Photo by Alinari.

the cook, to the man who empties the slops of her reverence, the cardinal's concubine; Lord, forgive us! 'T is like the song:

"'New Pharisees they,
The Lord they betray!'"

Then Hans Platter rose, his face grave, his voice drawling, and said:

"The cardinals went to their lord the Pope and inquired: 'What shall we do to be saved?' And Alexander answered: 'Why do ye ask of me? Is it not written in the Law? "Love silver and gold with all thine heart and with all thy mind and with all thy strength, and love thy rich neighbour as thyself. Do this and ye shall live."' And the Pope took his seat upon his throne and said: 'Blessed are they who have, for they shall see my face. Blessed are they who bring offerings, for they shall be called my sons. Blessed are they who come in the name of gold and silver, for of them is the Curia Romana. But woe unto you, ye who present yourselves with empty hands! It were better that a millstone were hanged about your necks and ye were cast into the depth of the sea.' And the cardinals answered: 'All that thou sayest we will do.' And the Pope said: 'Lo, I set before you an example, that ye may spoil the people, even as I have spoiled the living and the dead.' "

This sally provoked great mirth. Next Otto Marburg the organ-master, a handsome old

man, with a boyish smile, read a satire just printed and already handed about all over the city. It was in the form of an anonymous letter to Paolo Savelli, a rich noble who had fled to the Emperor from the persecutions of the Church. A long catalogue was set forth of the crimes and abominations in the house of the pontiff, beginning with simony, and ending with Cæsar's fratricide and the Pope's criminal amours with his own daughter. The epistle concluded with a passionate appeal to all princes and rulers in Europe, calling on them to unite and destroy this nest of assassins, these filthy reptiles disguised in the semblance of men; and asseverated that the reign of Antichrist had commenced, for of a truth the faith of the church of God had never had such foes as Pope Alexander VI. and Cæsar his son.

A discussion now arose as to whether, in very truth, the Pope were Antichrist. Otto Marburg said No; not he but Cæsar, who, it was clear, intended to be Alexander's successor. Fra Martino argued that Antichrist would be an incorporeal phantom; for, as said St. Cyril of Alexandria: "The Son of Perdition, called Antichrist, is none other than Satan himself."

Schweinitz shook his head and quoted St. John Chrysostom, who said: "Who is this? Is he Satan? By no means, but a man who shall have inherited Satan's power, for there are two beings in him: one human, the other devilish.

And he shall be the son of a virgin," which could never have been said of Alexander or of Cæsar.

But Schweinitz further quoted from Ephraim of Syria: "The devil shall seduce a virgin of the tribe of Dan, and she shall conceive and bring forth."

All crowded round him with questions and doubts; but imposing silence with his finger, and quoting from Jerome, Cyprian, Irenæus, and other of the fathers, he spoke further of the coming of Antichrist.

His face shall be as the face of a were-wolf, yet to many it shall seem like the face of Christ. And he shall do marvellous things. He shall bid the sea be still, and the sun turn into darkness, and the mountains remove, and the stones become bread. And he shall feed the hungry, and heal the sick, and the deaf, and the blind, and the feeble-kneed.

"Ah, the abominable dog!" cried Fra Martino, beside himself, and thumping his fist on the table; "but who will believe in him? Fra Tomaso, I think that not even babes could be taken by his deceits!"

"They will believe. Many will believe," said Schweinitz, shaking his head. "He shall lead them astray by the mask of sanctity. For he shall mortify his flesh, live chastely, contemning the love of women; he shall taste no meat, and shall be loving not only to men but to all living creatures which have breath. And like the wild

partridge he shall utter a strange call and shall deceive with his voice. 'Come unto me,' he shall say, 'all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.' "

"Then," interrupted Giovanni with bated breath, "who shall recognise, who unmask him?"

The monk fixed on the youth a profound and scrutinising regard and answered: "It will be impossible for men, but not for God. Even the saints shall not know to distinguish the light from the darkness. And there shall be weariness unto all nations, and confounding such as there was not from the beginning of the world. And they shall say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us,' and shall faint for fear and for expectation of the woes which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. Then he who impiously sitteth on the throne, in the very Temple of the Most High, shall say: 'O faithless generation! Ye ask for a sign and a sign shall be given unto you. Ye shall behold me, the Son of Man, coming in the clouds to judge both the quick and the dead.' And he shall take great wings, formed by devilish cunning, and shall soar into the sky amid thunders and lightnings, surrounded by his disciples in the semblance of angels."

Giovanni listened, pale as death, his eyes terror-struck; he remembered the broad folds of the raiment of Antichrist in Luca Signorelli's fresco; and he remembered also the folds flapping

in the wind on Leonardo's shoulders as he stood upon the precipice edge on the lonely summit of Monte Albano.

At this moment, from the larger room, whither Hans Platter had fled from the too serious discussion, came cries and the laughter of girls, the sound of running to and fro, the noise of overturned chairs and broken glasses—evidently Hans romping with the servant-maids. Presently to the jangling of strings rang out the old song:

"Virgin of the wine-cellar,
Sweet and fragrant Rosa,
'Ave! Ave!' I must sing
Virgo gloriosa.
A sober knave is he our host
With his fox's mask, Sir.
More than Holy Church, I boast,
Do I love his cask, Sir!
From the wiles of Cypris fair
And from Cupid's darts, oh!
Cowls nor tonsures can avail
To defend our hearts, oh!
For a solitary kiss
I 'd go to the block, Sir;
Fill me full of wine, Monk,
Or I 'll thee unfrock, Sir!
Holy fathers fear I not—
It is troth they say, Sir,
Gold in Rome has but to chink
And the laws give way, Sir.
Rome! the robbers' shrine is,
Thorny road to Hades—

And the Bishop's wine is
Made to toast the ladies!
Come then, wench, and kiss us.
Dum vinum potamus,
To Bacchus on Ilissus—
Te Deum Laudamus."

Thomas Schweinitz listened, and his fat visage expanded in a beatific grin.

II

At the hospital of San Spirito in Rome Leonardo had returned to his anatomical studies, assisted by Giovanni.

Noticing his pupil's low spirits, and wishing to divert him, the Master one day proposed to take him to the Vatican. The Pope had convened an assembly of learned men to discuss the boundaries of Spanish and Portuguese territory in the New World, with regard to which decision had been requested from the head of the Church. Curiosity prompted Giovanni to accept the invitation. Accordingly the two set out for the Vatican.

Passing through the Hall of the Popes, where Alexander had invested Cæsar with the Golden Rose, they entered the inner chambers (now called the Apartamenti Borgia). The arches and vaulting, and the mural spaces between the arches had all been decorated by Pinturicchio with brilliant frescoes—scenes from the New Testa-

ment, from the lives of the saints; scenes also from the pagan mysteries. Osiris was seen at his espousals with Isis, teaching men to till the ground, to gather fruits, to plant the vine; he was shown slain of men, rising again, leaving the earth, reappearing as the White Bull, the blameless Apis. However strange this deification of the Bull of the House of Borgia might seem in the chambers of the High Priest of Christendom, the all-pervading joy of life harmonised the two sets of subjects, the sacred and the profane, the Christian and the pagan mysteries, the son of Jupiter and the Son of Jehovah. In each picture slender cypresses bent before the breeze, among the broad hills proper to the painter's native Umbria; birds played at the vernal sports of love; St. Elizabeth embracing the Virgin cried, "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb"; by her side a boy was teaching a dog to stand on his hind legs; in the *Espousals of Osiris and Isis* just such another boy was riding naked on a sacred goose. The same spirit of delight breathed everywhere; in the rich saloons, flower-garlanded; in the angels, with their censers and crosses; in the dancing, goat-footed fauns carrying thyrsi and baskets of fruit; in the mystic Bull, the purple Beast, who, radiant as the morning sun, seemed to pour forth the joy of living.

"What is this?" questioned Giovanni of himself. "Is it blasphemy, or a childlike artlessness? Is not the sacred emotion on the face of Elizabeth

the same as that on the face of Isis? Is there not the same prayerful ecstasy on the face of Pope Alexander, bending the knee before the rising Lord, and on the countenance of the Egyptian priest receiving the sun-god slain of men and risen again in the shape of Apis? And this god before whom the people bow, singing hymns of praise and burning incense on his altar, this heraldic Bull of the Borgias, transformed into a Golden Calf, is nothing else than the Roman pontiff himself, whom the servile poets have called a god."

"Cæsare magna fuit, nunc Roma est maxima; Sextus
Regnat Alexander, ille vir, iste Deus."

This identification of the God and the Beast seemed to Giovanni absurd, yet awful.

As he examined the magnificent paintings with which the walls were adorned, he listened to the talk of the prelates and great men who filled the saloons and waited for the Pope.

"Whence come you, Messer Bertrando?" asked Cardinal d'Arborea of the Envoy from the Court of Ferrara.

"From the cathedral, Monsignore."

"How is His Holiness? Tired?"

"Not at all. He chanted as well as could possibly be. There is in his voice something so holy, so majestic, so angelic, that I could have imagined myself in heaven. When he lifted the cup,

The Visitation of the Virgin (Pinturicchio, Rome).

Photo by Anderson.

not I only, but many, could scarce restrain their tears."

"Of what disorder did Cardinal Miquele die?" asked the French Ambassador, abruptly.

"Of drinking something disagreeable," answered Don Juan Lopez, dryly. The majority at Alexander's Court were Spaniards like himself.

"They say," observed Bertrando, "that on the day after the Cardinal's death His Holiness declined to receive the Spanish Ambassador on account of his grief."

All exchanged glances. There were covert meanings in these remarks. The Pope's grief had been connected with counting the dead man's money, which proved less than he had expected; and the unwholesome drink was the Borgia poison, a sweet white powder which killed slowly. Alexander had invented this easy method of acquiring money. He knew the incomes of all the cardinals, and when he wanted money would despatch the wealthiest of them to the other world, and declare himself the heir. He fattened them for the table. The German, Johann Burckhardt, master of the ceremonies, frequently noted deaths of prelates in his diary, adding the pregnant laconicism, *Biberat calicem*—"He had drunk of the cup."

"Is it true, Monsignore," asked Don Pedro Carranca, a chamberlain, "that Cardinal Monreale is taken ill?"

"Really? What ails him?" cried d'Arborea, alarmed.

"Vomiting."

"*Dio mio! Dio mio!* the fourth!" sighed the poor Cardinal. "Orsini, Ferrari, Miquele, and now Monreale!"

"The waters of Tiber must be bad for Your Eminences," said Messer Bertrando, slyly.

"One after the other! one after the other!" sighed d'Arborea; "to-day strong and well, to-morrow——"

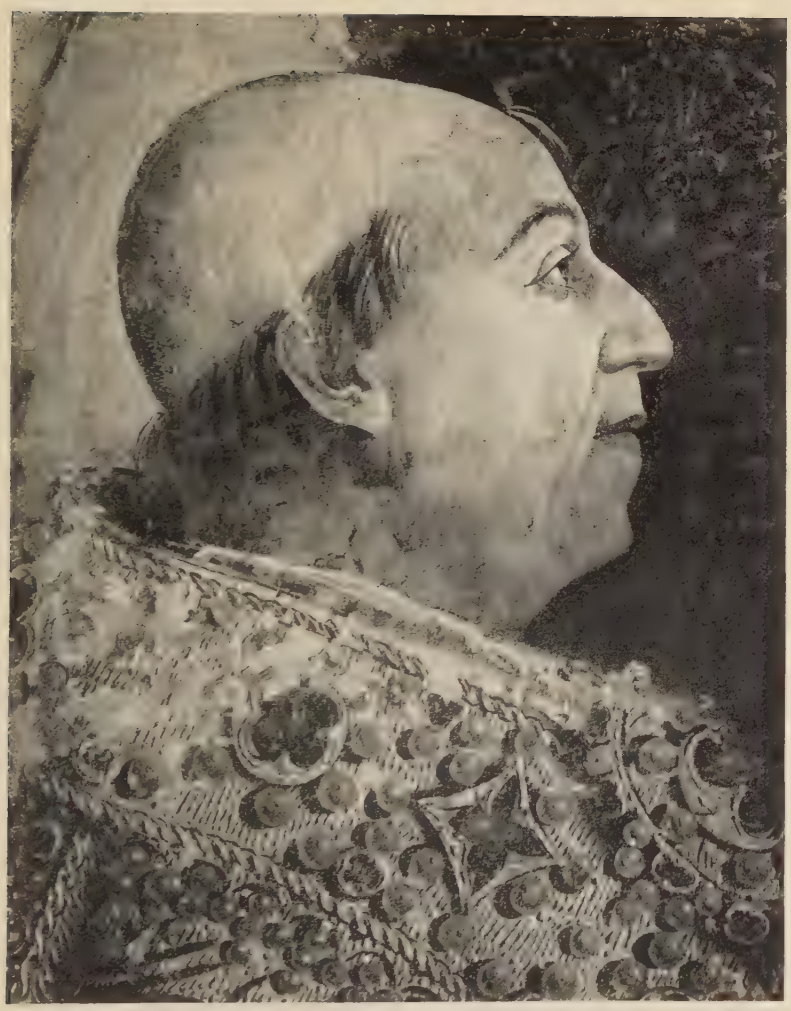
All became silent. From the next room entered a fresh crowd of courtiers marshalled by Don Rodriguez Borgia, the Pope's nephew. A murmur ran through the room.

"The Holy Father! The Holy Father!"

The crowd parted, the doors were thrown open, and into the audience-chamber came Pope Alexander VI.

III

He had been singularly handsome in his youth. It was said then that he had only to look at a woman to inspire her with the wildest passion, as if in his eyes a force was concentred which drew women like a magnet. Even now his features, though blunted and coarsened by age and fat, retained an imposing beauty of line. His skin was bronzed, his head bald, with a few tufts of grey hair at the nape. The nose was large and aquiline, the chin receding, the eyes



Pope Alexander the Sixth (Dettaglio, Rome).

Photo by Anderson.

vivacious. The full protruding lips showed sensuality, yet had something simple and naïve in their expression.

Giovanni could see nothing terrible or cruel in his face. Alexander Borgia possessed in the highest degree the gift of taste; he had that attractive exterior which made whatever he said or did appear said or done in the only right way.

"The Pope is seventy," said the ambassadors, "but he grows daily younger. His heaviest cares last but twenty-four hours. His temperament is cheerful; everything to which he puts his hand turns out well. He thinks of nothing but the reputation and the happiness of his children."

The Borgias were descended from Moors of Castile; it was, indeed, not difficult to recognise in the Pope the bronze skin, the full scarlet lips, the flashing eyes of the African Arab.

"He could not have a more appropriate background," thought Giovanni, "than these pictures of the joys and triumphs of Apis, the ancient Egyptian Bull."

Indeed the septuagenarian Pope seemed, in the vigour of his health, like enough to his own heraldic Beast, the sun-god, the god of merriment, lubricity, and generation.

As he entered, he was in conversation with a Jew, the goldsmith Salomone da Sessa, who had engraved the Triumph of Cæsar on the sword of the *Gonfaloniere*. He had also pleased the Pope

by so exquisitely cutting an emerald with a figure of Venus that Alexander had had it set on the cross which he used when blessing the people on solemn festivals, so that when he kissed the crucifix he should kiss also the Goddess of Love. In spite of his crimes, Alexander was not impious; he was really devout, particularly reverential of the Blessed Virgin, whom he considered his gracious Mediatress at the throne of the Most High. He was ordering a lamp now of Salomone, an offering he had vowed to St. Maria del Popolo, in gratitude for the recovery from illness of Madonna Lucrezia his daughter.

Seating himself at the window, the Pope inspected some precious stones; he was passionately fond of jewels. With long shapely fingers he touched the crystals gently, his thick lips parted in a smile; especially he admired a large chrysoprase—darker than an emerald, with mysterious sparkles of gold, green, and purple. Then he called for a casket of pearls from his treasure-chest. Whenever he opened this casket he thought of his beloved daughter, who was herself like a pearl. He called the envoy from Ferrara, whose Duke, Alfonso d'Este, was his son-in-law.

"Take heed, Bertrando, that you do not leave Rome till I have given you a present for Madonna Lucrezia. You must n't leave the old uncle with empty hands." (He had sufficient care for appearances sometimes to call Lucrezia his niece.)

Taking a priceless pink Indian pearl, the size

of a hazel-nut, from the casket, he held it up to the light and gloated over it. He pictured it on Lucrezia's white bosom; he hesitated whether he should give it to her or to the Blessed Virgin. But, reminding himself that it was sinful to take away what had been vowed to Heaven, he handed the pearl to Salomone, and bade him set it in a lamp between the chrysoprase and the carbuncle, gift from the Sultan.

"Bertrando," he turned again to the Ambassador, "when you see the Duchess, tell her from me to keep well, and to pray earnestly to the Queen of Heaven. Tell her we are in the best of health, and give her our apostolic blessing. This evening I will send you the little gift for her."

The Spanish Ambassador exclaimed, drawing nearer:

"Of a truth, I have never seen such richness of pearls!"

"Yes," said the Pope, complacently, "I have a fine collection. I have been making it for twenty years. My daughter is very fond of pearls." He laughed. "She knows what suits her, the little rogue!"

Then after a pause he added solemnly: "When I die, Lucrezia shall have the best pearls in Italy!"

And plunging his hands in them he let them trickle through his fingers, delighting in their soft pale splendour and smooth, satin-like texture.

"All for her! All for her, our delicious daughter!" he repeated in a low hoarse voice.

And suddenly a fire sparkled in his eyes; and Giovanni, remembering whispers of the monstrous passion of the aged Borgia for this Lucrezia, froze at heart with horror and shame.

IV

Just then a page announced that, according to His Holiness's order, Cæsar was waiting in the next saloon. Alexander had summoned him on a matter of urgent importance: the French King had expressed disapproval of Valentinois' designs against Florence, and had charged the Pope with countenancing them.

After listening to the page's announcement, Alexander glanced at the French Ambassador, drew him adroitly aside, left him (accidentally, apparently) by the door of the room where Cæsar was waiting, and passing through the door left it (accidentally again) slightly ajar, so that the Ambassador and those about him should hear all that passed between father and son.

Soon vehement reproaches were audible. Cæsar spoke calmly and respectfully, but the old man, stamping his foot, cried furiously:

"Out of my sight! Choke, son of a cur! son of a harlot!

"*Dio mio!* do you hear?" whispered the Frenchman to Messer Antonio Giustiniani, the Venetian Ambassador, "he will strike him!"

The Venetian shrugged his shoulders. If it came to blows, he thought the son more likely

to stab the father, than the father the son. Since the murder of the Duke of Candia, the Pope had feared Cæsar; his paternal pride and doting fondness had become mixed with a superstitious terror. All remembered how Perotto, the youngest of the chamberlains, had taken refuge from Cæsar under the folds of the papal mantle, and Cæsar had poniarded him on the pontiff's breast, splashing Alexander with his blood. Giustiniani guessed also that the present dispute was a feint, got up for the Frenchman's benefit, to persuade him that if the Duke had designs against Florence the Pope was innocent of them. Giustiniani believed that the two always supported each other; the father never doing what he said, the son never saying what he did.

Having threatened, cursed, and all but excommunicated his son, the Pope returned to the hall of audience, still trembling, panting, and wiping the perspiration from his empurpled face. Nevertheless, in his eyes shone a gleam of amusement. Again he called the Frenchman, and this time drew him towards the Cortile del Belvedere.

"Your Holiness knows," began the envoy, much distressed, "I had no desire to breed discord——"

"What? did you hear?" cried the Pope, seeming much astonished. And without giving him time to think, he took him familiarly by the chin with finger and thumb (a sign of great amity), and spoke impetuously of his devotion to the Most Christian King, and of the extraordinary purity

of Cæsar's motives. The Frenchman was bewildered, and though he had irrefragable proof of the deception, felt disposed rather to deny the evidence of his own eyes than to disbelieve that voice, those eyes, those lips. Indeed, Alexander always lied like one inspired. He never prearranged what he was going to say, but lied as artlessly, as innocently as a woman in love. He had practised this art so long that he had attained perfection in it; he was an artist carried away by his imagination.

V

At this moment his secret body-servant approached the Pope and whispered to him. Alexander with an anxious air passed into the next room, and thence through a concealed door into a narrow vaulted passage where Cardinal Monreale's cook was awaiting him.

He brought news that the quantity of poison had been insufficient and the Cardinal was recovering. However, after minutely catechising the cook, the Pope convinced himself that his victim would die in two or three months' time, which would be all the better as averting suspicion.

"It seems a pity, too!" thought Alexander. "The poor old man was amusing and a good Christian."

Wishing he could have got the money in some other way, he sighed and returned to the audience

hall. In the adjoining chamber, sometimes used as a refectory, he saw a table laid and felt hungry. Deferring the business matters, he invited the company to dinner. The table was ornamented with white lilies, the flower of the Annunciation, a favourite with the Pope, who said it reminded him of Madonna Lucrezia. The dishes were not numerous, for the Pope was plain and sparing in his diet. Giovanni listened to the talk among the chamberlains.

Don Juan Lopez, the "laterculensis," spoke of the late dispute between father and son, and defended Cæsar as if he had no suspicion that the whole affair had been a comedy. The rest agreed with him and lauded Cæsar to the skies.

"Ah no," said the Pope, shaking his head with reproachful tenderness, "you don't know what he is. A day never passes in which I am not in terror about him lest he should commit some new imprudence. He will end by breaking his neck and bringing us all to ruin."

His eyes sparkled with paternal pride.

"But what makes Cæsar like this?" he went on; "whom does he take after? You know me, a simple and guileless old man; what I have in my heart, that comes from my tongue! But Cæsar, Lord knows, keeps counsel; always hiding something. Believe me, sirs, sometimes I reprove and scold at him, and at the same time I have terror in my soul. That 's it. I am afraid of my own son! He is polite—ay, too polite; and

then of a sudden he looks me a look like a dagger in my heart."

The guests, however, defended Cæsar still more warmly.

"Oh, I know! I know!" said the Pope, "you love him like your own, and won't let us abuse him."

The room was suffocatingly hot, and Alexander's head swam, not from wine, but from the intoxication of his son's glory. They all rose and went forth on the balcony which gave on the Cortile del Belvedere. The air was pure and delicious; below, the grooms were bringing fiery mares and ardent stallions out of the stables.

*

Surrounded by the cardinals and dignitaries, the Pope stood watching the horses, long silent. Gradually his face clouded, for he remembered Lucrezia. Her image rose before him; her blue eyes, the pale gold of her hair, her rosy lips a little full like his own; pure and dainty as a pearl; docile and gentle; in the midst of evil, knowing it not; passionless and unsullied. Why had he consented to her marriage with Alfonso d'Este, the Duke of Ferrara?

*

Sighing heavily, with drooping head, as if for the first time the burden of age had fallen on his shoulders, he led the company back to the Hall of Audience.

VI

Globes, maps, compasses were there lying ready for the marking out of the meridian, which was to pass over a point three hundred and seventy Portuguese leagues to the south of the Azores and the island of Cape de Verde. This point was chosen because, according to Columbus, the "navel of the earth" was there; the pear-like projection, the mountain reaching to the lunar sphere, which he had postulated on account of the deviation in his compass.

From the extreme western point of Portugal on the one side and the coasts of Brazil on the other, even distances were to be measured to the proposed line. Then shipmasters and astronomers were bidden to calculate how many days of sailing were equal to these distances. The Pope offered prayer, blessed the globe, and dipping a brush in red ink, drew across the Atlantic from the North Pole to the South the broad line which was to secure peace. All islands and lands to the east of this line were to belong to Spain, all to the west, to Portugal. Thus by one motion of his hand he parted the globe in halves and divided it between the Christian nations. At this moment Alexander seemed grand and majestic to Giovanni; full of the consciousness of his power, the world-swaying Cæsar–Pope, centre of two kingdoms—the earthly and the heavenly.

That same evening in his apartments in the

Vatican, Cæsar Borgia gave a feast to His Holiness and the sacred College of Cardinals, at which were present "fifty of the fairest and most famous of the Roman *cortigiane oneste;* called officially "*meretrices honestæ nuncupatæ.*"

*

Thus was celebrated that memorable day in the annals of the Church, which had been marked by the partition of the globe.

Leonardo was present at the supper and witnessed everything. Invitations to such feasts were great favours and could not be declined. On returning home he said to Giovanni:

"In every man there is a god and a beast, coupled."

Going on with his anatomical drawing, he added:

"Persons with base minds and unworthy passions do not merit so complex and beautiful a physical structure as others, of high intelligence and lofty thoughts. 'T were enough if they had a bag with two openings, one to receive, the other to eject food; for, in plain fact, they be no more than a passage for nourishment."

Next morning Giovanni found the Master at work on his painting *San Gerolamo nel deserto.* In a savage den, the recluse, kneeling and gazing at the Crucified, beats his breast so vehemently that the lion at his feet looks into his eyes, and has opened his jaws in a long and pitiful moan, as if in compassion for his master.

St. Girolamo (Leonardo da Vinci, Rome).

Photo by Anderson.

Boltraffio remembered that other picture, white Leda embraced by the swan, the goddess consumed by the flames of Savonarola's pyre. And as so often before, he asked himself again which of these opposed conceptions was dearest to the heart of the Master? or could the two be equally dear?

VII

Summer came. Putrid fever of the Pontine marshes, the "malaria," began to rage in the city; at the end of July there were daily deaths among those about the Pope. He himself appeared troubled and sad; but it was less the fear of death which was oppressing him, than the absence of his idolised Lucrezia. He had before now had several attacks of fierce desire, blind and dumb, like madness, terrifying even to himself; he fancied that if he did not satisfy them at once they would suffocate him. He wrote begging her to come for a few days; she replied that her husband would not permit her to leave him. The aged Borgia would have shrunk from no crime to rid himself of this detested son-in-law as he had rid himself of Lucrezia's earlier husbands. But there was no jesting with the Duke of Ferrara, for he had the finest artillery in Italy.

At the beginning of August Alexander went to the villa of Cardinal Adrian of Corneto. At supper he ate more heartily than usual and drank heavy Sicilian wines; afterwards he sat long on the

terrace, enjoying the insidious freshness of the Roman night. Next morning he felt himself indisposed. It was told afterwards that having approached the window he saw two funerals, that of his favourite chamberlain, and that of Messer Guglielmo Raimondi, both men heavy in figure like himself.

"The season is dangerous for us fat folk," he murmured forebodingly. The words were no sooner uttered than a dove flew in at the window, dashed itself against the wall, and fell stunned at the feet of His Holiness.

"Another omen," he muttered, turning pale; and at once he went to his apartment and lay down. In the night he was seized with violent vomiting. The physicians had different opinions about his malady: some called it a tertian fever; others, apoplexy; others, inflammation of the gall-bladder. In the town it was said that he was poisoned.

Every hour his strength declined. Ten days later they had recourse to their extreme measure, and gave him a decoction of precious stones reduced to powder. Still he grew worse.

One night, awaking from delirium, he fumbled anxiously in his breast for a small gold reliquary worn by him for many years and containing minute particles of the body and blood of the Lord. The astrologers had told him his life was safe so long as he carried it. But now, whether it had been lost or stolen, it could nowhere be found, and he closed his eyes in the calm of despair, saying:

"It means I am to go: all is ended!"

Next morning, feeling the weakness of death coming over him, he required all to leave him except his favourite physician, the Bishop of Venosa. Him he reminded of the remedy employed by a Hebrew doctor on his predecessor, Innocent VIII., namely, the injection into the veins of the dying Pope of the blood of three children newly slain.

"Does Your Holiness know how it ended?" asked the Bishop.

"I know! I know!" said Alexander, faintly. "But the children were seven years old and they should have been unweaned."

The Bishop made no reply; already the sick man's eyes were clouding, and he fell back into delirium.

"Yes; quite young; little white ones! They whose blood is pure and scarlet. I love children! Let them come to me. *Sinite parvulos ad me venire!* Suffer little children to come unto me!"

At these ravings, even the imperturbable Bishop, long inured to the horrors of the Court, could not repress a shudder. With monotonous convulsive movements, the Pope still fumbled and groped in his bosom for the vanished reliquary.

During his illness he had never once mentioned his children. They told him that Cæsar, like himself, lay at death's door, but he remained unmoved. Now they asked him if he desired any last message to his son or his daughter, but he turned away his head and said no word. It seemed as if those,

whom in his lifetime he had so passionately loved, no longer had any existence for him.

On the 18th, Friday, he confessed to his chaplain and made his communion. At the hour of vespers they read the prayers for the dying. Several times he made an effort to speak, and Cardinal Ilerda, bending down, at last caught the faint sounds coming from his cold lips:

"Quick! quick! The Stabat Mater! the hymn to my Mediatress!" he whispered.

The hymn is not included in the office for the dying, but Ilerda repeated it:

"Stabat Mater dolorosa
Juxta Crucem lacrimosa
Dum pendebat Filius. . . ."

An ineffable comfort shone in the dying eyes, as if he saw heaven opened and his Mediatress waiting. He stretched out his hands, shuddered, raised himself, and murmured:

"Cast me not away, O Holy Virgin!"

Then he fell back on his pillows. He was dead.

VIII

At the same time Cæsar Borgia likewise lay between life and death. Monsignor Gaspare Torella, his episcopal physician, ordered a heroic remedy: the patient was to be plunged into the belly of a newly-slain mule, then into icy water. Whether

by virtue of this severe treatment, or of his extraordinary strength of will, Cæsar recovered.

During all those terrible days he had maintained complete calmness and self-possession. He followed the course of events, listened to reports, dictated letters, and issued orders. When news came of the Pope's death, he had himself transported by the secret passage from the Vatican to the Castle of St. Angelo.

Strange stories touching Alexander's death were circulated through the town. Marin Sanuto reported to the Republic of Venice that an ape had come into his room, and when one of the cardinals would have captured it, the Pope cried out:

"Let it alone! Let it alone! It is the devil!"

"It was also said that he frequently cried out:

"I will come! I will come! Do but wait a little longer!"

And the explanation ran, that upon the death of Innocent VIII., Rodrigo Borgia had sold himself to the Evil One for the sake of twenty years of the papal power.

Again it was related that at the moment of death, seven demons appeared at his pillow; and he was no sooner dead than the body began to rock and to boil, and steam came from his mouth as from a cauldron; his form swelled till it had lost all human shape, and his face became black as an Ethiopian's.

It was the custom upon the death of a pope to say funeral masses for nine days at St. Peter's, but

such was the terror inspired by this deformed and putrefying corpse, that none could be induced to undertake these extreme offices. There were no lights about the bier, nor incense, nor guards, nor mourners. It was long before any could be found to put him in a coffin. At last six ruffians undertook the task for a bottle of wine. The coffin was too small, but the triple crown having been lifted from the head, the body was rolled in a ragged cloth and forced into the receptacle. It was indeed whispered that he had no coffin, but was dropped into a pit head foremost like a victim of the plague.

But even after its burial this poor corpse was allowed no pardon; the superstitious terrors of the people augmented daily. The very air seemed polluted, and a pervading loathsome stench was added to the epidemic fever. A black dog appeared in St. Peter's, running round and round in ever widening circles. The inhabitants of the Borgo dared not leave their homes after nightfall. Many were convinced that Alexander had not died a natural death, but would reappear on the throne and the reign of Antichrist would begin.

All these and similar reports did Giovanni Boltraffio hear in the Vicolo Sinibaldi, in the wine-cellar of Yan Khromy, the lame Czech Hussite.

IX

Meantime Leonardo, careless of political events

and removed from all his friends, was working on a picture begun some time ago to the order of the Servite monks of Santa Maria Annunziata at Florence. It represented St. Anne and the Virgin Mary: perfect knowledge and perfect love. St. Anne was like a sibyl, eternally young; on her downcast eyes, on her delicately curved lips, there played a mystery of seduction, full of the wisdom of the serpent, not unlike Leonardo's own smile. Beside her, the face of Mary, childish and simple, breathed the innocence of the dove. She knew because she loved, while Anne loved because she knew. Looking at this picture, Giovanni thought that for the first time he understood the Master's saying, "that Great Love is the daughter of Great Knowledge." Leonardo at this time was also designing machines of various kinds and shapes, gigantic cranes, pumps, saws, borers; weaving, fulling, rope-making, and smith's apparatus.

As often before, Giovanni was astonished that he could occupy himself simultaneously in such widely different ways, but the seeming discord was intentional.

"I maintain," he wrote in his *Principles of Mechanics*, "that Force is something spiritual and unseen—spiritual, because the life in it is incorporeal, because the body in which the force is generated changes neither its weight nor its aspect."

Leonardo's destiny was decided with that of Cæsar Borgia. The latter, though he never lost audacity and calm, felt that fortune had betrayed

him. At the time of the Pope's death and Cæsar's own illness, their enemies leagued themselves and seized the Roman Campagna. Prospero Colonna advanced to the city gates, Baglioni on Perugia. Urbino, Camerino, Piombino recovered their independence. The Conclave, assembled for the election of the new Pope, demanded the removal of the Duke from Rome. The whole order of things was changed; it seemed as if all were lost.

Those who had trembled before "the elect of Heaven," as Machiavelli had called him, now rejoiced at his overthrow, and kicked the dying lion with asses' hoofs. The poets furnished epigrams:

"Cæsar or nothing! Both we find in thee,
Who Cæsar wast, and soon shalt nothing be."

Leonardo, conversing one day in the Vatican with Antonio Giustiniani the Venetian, turned the conversation on Machiavelli.

"Has he told you of his book on statecraft?"

"Oh yes; he has mentioned it frequently, but no doubt he spoke in jest. That is not a book to give to the world! Who writes such books? Counsel to rulers? Revelation of the secrets of government?—showing that all rule is violence covered by a mask of justice? 'T were to teach the hens the methods of the fox; to arm the sheep with wolf's teeth! God guard us from such politics!"

"Then you think Messer Niccolò in error, and that he will change his opinions?"

"Nay, my opinion is with him. We do well to

St. Anne and the Virgin (Leonardo da Vinci, Paris).

Photo by Mansell.

act as he counsels; only let us not *speak* it. Yet if he do give his book to the world, I doubt it will harm any but himself. The sheep and the fowls will go on trusting the wolves and the foxes. All will be invariable as before. God is merciful; the world will last our time."

X

In the autumn of 1503 Pietro Soderini, Perpetual Gonfaloniere of Florence, invited Leonardo to enter his service, intending to employ him in the construction of military engines for the siege of Pisa. The stay of the artist in Rome was therefore nearing its close.

One evening he wandered on the Palatine Hill, where had stood the palaces of Augustus, Caligula, and Septimius Severus. Now only the wind howled in the ruins, and among the olives and the acanthus were heard the bleating of sheep and the chirrup of the grasshopper. The ground was strewn with marble fragments, and Leonardo knew that statues of rare beauty of the gods and heroes of the ancient world were buried under the ruins, like dead men awaiting the resurrection. The evening was serene and fair; the brick skeletons of arches, vaults, and walls glowed fiery in the rays of the sinking sun.

The autumn foliage was all scarlet and gold, as once had been the chambers of the Roman emperors.

On the northern slope of the hill, not far from the gardens of Capranica, Leonardo knelt to examine a fragment of marble. At this moment a man appeared on the tangled footpath.

"Is it you, Messer Niccolò?" said Leonardo, rising and embracing him.

The Florentine Secretary seemed still shabbier than when Leonardo had made his acquaintance on the road to Fano; it was evident that the Signoria still neglected him. He was thin, his shaven cheeks seemed quite blue, his long neck bent wearily, his nose seemed more prominent and beak-like, his eyes more fevered. Leonardo asked him of his whereabouts and his affairs; but when he spoke of Cæsar, Niccolò turned away, shrugging his shoulders and replying with simulated indifference:

"I have seen strange things in my life; I no longer wonder at anything"; and then he fell to questioning Leonardo as if anxious to change the subject. When he heard that his friend had entered the service of Florence, Machiavelli cried:

"Be not elated! God only knows which is the worse, the crimes of a hero like Cæsar, or the virtues of our ant-hill of a republic. Oh, I know the beauties of a popular government!" and he smiled bitterly.

Leonardo told him Giustiniani's parable of the hens and the foxes, the sheep and the wolves.

"Truth remains truth," said Niccolò, restored to good humour. "True, I irritate the hens and

Pietro Soderini (Florence).

Photo by Alinari.

the foxes too; they are ready to burn me at the stake for being the first to describe what they have all been doing ever since the world began. The tyrants think me an inciter to revolution, the populace believe me in league with the tyrants, the religious call me an infidel, the good call me wicked, and the wicked hate me more than they all because I seem to them more wicked than themselves. Ah, Messer Leonardo, do you recall our conversations? You and I have a common fate. The discovery of new truths is, and has ever been, more dangerous than discovery of new lands. You and I are solitary in a crowd, strangers, superfluous, homeless wanderers, perpetual outcasts. He who is unlike others is alone against all; for the world has been created for the masses, and outside the vulgar no one is anything. Ay, my friend, this is a serious matter, for it means that life is tedious; and the worst misfortune in life is not sickness, nor poverty, nor grief; but tediousness."

In silence they descended the western slope of the Palatine, and by the Via della Consolazione reached the foot of the Capitol, the ruins of the Temple of Saturn, the place where in the days of glory had stood the Forum Romanum.

From the Arch of Septimius Severus, as far as to the Flavian amphitheatre, the Via Sacra was flanked by wretched hovels. Their foundations were formed of fragments of statues, of the limbs and torsos of Olympian gods. For centuries the forum had been a quarry. Christian churches lan-

guished on the ruins of pagan shrines. Layer upon layer of street rubbish, of dust, of filth, had raised the level of the ground more than ten cubits. Yet still lofty columns soared upwards and carried sculptured architraves—last traces of a vanished art.

Machiavelli showed his companion the site of the Roman Senate, the Curia, where now a cattle-market was held, giving to the whole glorious area the ignoble name of "Campo Vaccino." Huge white bullocks, and the black buffaloes of the Pontine marshes lay on the ground, swine routed in the puddles, liquid mire and every sort of filth befouled the fallen columns, the marble slabs, the half-defaced inscriptions. A feudal tower, once the stronghold of the *Frangipani*, leaned against the Arch of Titus; beside it was a tavern for the peasants who came to the market. Cries of brawling women were heard through the windows, and the refuse of meat and fish was flung out by careless hands. Half-washed rags were dried on a string, and beneath them sat an aged and deformed beggar bandaging his sore and swollen foot. Behind this squalor rose the arch, white and pure, less shattered than the remaining monuments. Bas-reliefs adorned both sides of the interior: on the right Titus the conqueror, on the left the captive Jews with their altar, shewbread, and seven-branched candlestick, mere trophies for the victor; at the top of the arch a broad-winged eagle bearing the deified Cæsar to Olympus. Machiavelli read

the inscription in sonorous tones: "*Senatus Populusque Romanus divo Tito divi Vespasiani filio Vespasiano Augusto.*"

The sunlight coming through the arch from the direction of the Capitol lit up the Emperor's triumph, the malodorous curls of smoke from the tavern seemed like clouds of incense. Niccolò's heart beat as, turning once more to the Forum, he saw the light on the three exquisite columns before the church of St. Maria Liberatrice; the dreary jangling of the bells sounding the Ave Maria seemed to him a dirge over fallen greatness. They directed their steps to the Coliseum.

"Ay," he said, contemplating the titanic blocks of which the amphitheatre's walls are made, "those who could erect such monuments were more than our equals. 'T is only here in Rome that one can feel the difference between us and the ancients. We are unable even to figure what men they were."

"I know not," said Leonardo, awaking with an effort from his musing; "we of this age have not less force than the ancients; only 't is force of another sort."

"Christian humility, I suppose?"

"Ay, humility amongst other things, perhaps."

"It may be so," said Niccolò coldly.

They seated themselves on a broken step of the amphitheatre.

"Men should either accept Christ or reject him," exclaimed Machiavelli in a sudden outburst; "we do neither the one nor the other. We are neither

Christian nor heathen. We have fallen away from the one, and have not submitted to the other. We have not the strength for righteousness, we have not the courage for wickedness. We are neither black nor white, but a scurvy grey; neither cold nor hot, but a mawkish lukewarm. We have become so false, so pusillanimous, we have twisted about, and halted so long between Christ and Belial, that now we neither know what we want nor whither we are tending. The ancients at least knew that much, and were logical to the end; did not pretend to turn the right cheek to him who smote the left. But since men began to believe that to earn Paradise they should suffer any injustice, any violence on earth, an open door has been set before rascals. Is it not a fact that Christianity has paralysed the world, and made it a prey to villains?"

His voice shook, his eyes flashed with consuming hatred, his face was contorted as if from unendurable pain.

Leonardo made no answer. He gazed at the blue heavens shining through gaps in the Coliseum walls; and he reflected that nowhere did the azure sky seem so radiant and stainless as in the interstices of ruins. Birds were flitting in and out of the holes left where the barbarians had wrenched away the iron bars. Leonardo watched them fluttering to their roosting places; and he thought how the world-swaying Cæsars, who had erected the building, and the northern hordes who had pillaged it, had worked for those of whom it is written: "They

Arch of Titus (Rome).

Photo by Anderson.

sow not, neither do they reap; and God feedeth them."

Everything to Leonardo was joy, to Niccolò all was vexation; honey to one was gall to the other; perfected knowledge had bred love in the one, hatred in the other. But Machiavelli interrupted these musings, as usual anxious to end the conversation with a joke:

"I perceive, Messer Leonardo, that they who think you impious stand in gross error. In the Judgment, when the angelic trump shall separate the lambs from the wolves, you will be among lambs."

"Well," said the painter, falling in with his humour, "if I get to Paradise, you will come with me."

"I cry you mercy! I have suffered overmuch in this world from tedium! My place I will give to any anxious for it. Hearken, good friend, and I will relate to you a dream. I was taken into an assembly of hungered, unwashen outcasts, monks with yellow faces, old beggars, slaves, cripples, idiots, and taught that these were they of whom it it written: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Then they had me to another place, where I saw an assembly of men in semblance like senators. Among them were emperors, and popes, and captains, and lawgivers, and philosophers; Homer, Alexander the Great, Marcus Aurelius. They talked of learning and of statecraft. And to my wonderment I was

told this was hell, and these were all sinners cast out by God, because they had loved the world and the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness with the Lord. And I was bidden to choose between hell and heaven, and I cried: 'To hell with me! With the sages and the heroes!'"

"If the reality be as you describe it," said Leonardo, "I also should prefer——"

"Nay, it is too late! You have made your choice. You will be rewarded for Christian virtues by a Christian heaven!"

They lingered in the Coliseum till dark. The yellow moon had sailed up from behind the stupendous arches of the Basilica of Constantine, severing with her rays a bed of cloud, transparent and delicately tinted as mother-o'-pearl. The three columns in front of St. Maria Liberatrice shone like phantoms. And the cracked bell sounding the Christian "Angelus" seemed more than ever like a dirge over the trampled and forgotten Romans.

BOOK XIV

MONNA LISA GIOCONDA—1503–1506

"The darkness of that subterranean place was too deep, and when I had passed some time therein, two feelings awoke within me and contended — fear and curiosity: fear of exploring that dark depth; curiosity as to its secret."—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

I

LEONARDO used to say:

"For portraits, have a special studio; a court, oblong and rectangular, ten *braccia* in width, twenty in length, the walls painted black, with a projecting roof and canvas curtains for the sun. Or, if you have n't the canvas curtains, paint only in the twilight, or when it is clouded and dull. That is the perfect light."

Just such a court for the painting of portraits he had made for himself in the house of the Florentine citizen who lodged him; a notable personage, commissary of the Signoria, a mathematician, a man of intellect and of amiability, his name Ser Pietro di Braccio Martelli. His house was the second in the Via Martelli, on the left as one goes from San Giovanni to the Palazzo Medici.

It was a warm misty afternoon, towards the

close of spring, in the year 1505. The sun shone through the clouds; there was a dull light, which seemed as if shining under water, throwing delicate liquid shadows—Leonardo's favourite condition of the atmosphere; which, he thought, gave special charm to the face of a woman.

"Will she come?" he asked himself, thinking of her whose portrait he had been painting for nearly three years, with a tenacity and a zeal unwonted.

He arranged the studio for her reception. Boltraffio, watching him, marvelled at his unusual solicitude.

He prepared palette, brushes, and skins of paint, each one coated with a transparent film of gum arabic. He removed the cover from the portrait, which was disposed on a movable three-legged stand called a *leggio*. He set the fountain playing in the middle of the court. It had been constructed for her delight—falling streams striking against glass spheres put them in motion and produced a strange low music. Her favourite flowers had been planted round the fountain—pale irises—the lilies of Florence. Then he crumbled bread in a basket for the tame doe which lived in the court, and which she used to feed with her own hands; lastly, he arranged her chair, of smooth dark oak with carved back and arms; before it he placed a soft rug, upon which was already curled and purring a white cat of a rare breed, procured for her pleasure, a dainty foreign beast with vari-

coloured eyes, the right yellow as a topaz, the left sapphire blue.

Meantime, Andrea Salaino had begun to tune the viol; another musician, one Atalante, whom Leonardo had known at the Milanese Court, brought the silver lyre, shaped like a horse's head, which the artist had invented.

The best musicians, singers, story-tellers, and poets, the most witty talkers, were invited by Leonardo to his studio to amuse *her*, and avert the tedium of her sittings. He studied the changeful beauty of *her* expression as reflects of thought and feeling were awakened by talk, music, poetry, in turn.

Now all was ready, but still she delayed her coming.

"Where is she?" he thought; "the light and the shadow to-day are just her own. Shall I send to seek her? Nay, but she knows how ardently I await her! She will come."

And Giovanni noticed that his impatience grew.

Suddenly a light waft of the breeze swayed the jet of the fountain, the delicate irises shook as the spray fell on them. The keen-eared doe was on the alert, with outstretched neck. Leonardo listened. And Giovanni, though he heard nothing, knew it was *she*.

First, with a humble reverence, came Sister Camilla, a lay-companion who lived with her, and always attended her to the studio, sitting quietly apart studying a prayer-book, and effacing herself,

so that in three years Leonardo had hardly heard her voice. The sister was followed by the woman all expected: a woman of thirty, in a plain dark dress, and a dark transparent veil which reached to the centre of her forehead—Monna Lisa Gioconda.

She was a Neapolitan of noble birth; her father, Antonio Gherardini, had lost his wealth in the French invasion of 1495, and had married his daughter to the Florentine, Francesco del Giocondo, who had seen the death of two wives already. Messer Francesco was five years younger then Leonardo; was one of the twelve *Bonuomini*, and was likely later to be made Prior. He was a mediocre personage, of a type to be found in every country and in every age; neither good nor bad; busy in a commonplace way, absorbed in his affairs, content with daily routine. He regarded his young wife as nothing more than an ornament for his house. Her essential charm he understood less than the points of his Sicilian cattle, or the impost upon raw sheepskins. She was said to have married this man solely to please her father, and by her marriage to have driven an earlier lover to a voluntary death. It was also said that she still had a crowd of passionate adorers—persevering, but hopeless. The scandal-mongers could find nothing worse than this to insinuate. Calm, gentle, retiring, pious, charitable to the poor, she was a faithful wife, a good housekeeper, a most tender mother to Dianora, her twelve-year-old step-daughter.

Giovanni knew all this of Monna Lisa. Yet

she never visited Leonardo's studio without seeming to the pupil a wholly different person from Messer Francesco's wife. She had been coming now for three years, and Giovanni's first impressions had been only confirmed by subsequent observations. He found something mysterious, illusory, phantasmal about her which filled him with awe. Leonardo's portrait seemed more real than she was herself. She and the painter—whom she never saw except when sitting to him, and then never alone—appeared to share some secret; not a love-secret, at least not in the ordinary sense of the term.

Leonardo had once spoken of the tendency felt by every artist to reproduce his own likeness in his pictures of others, the reason of this tendency being that both his own material semblance and his work are the creation and manifestation of his soul. In this case Giovanni found that not merely the portrait, but the woman herself, was growing daily more like the painter. The likeness was less in the features than in the expression of eyes and in the smile. But he had already seen this smile on the lips of Verrocchio's Unbelieving Thomas; of Eve before the Tree of Science, Leonardo's first picture; in the Leda; in the Angel of the *Madonna delle Roccie;* and in a hundred other drawings, executed before he had met Monna Lisa: as though, throughout life, he had sought his own reflection, and had found it completely at last.

When Giovanni looked at that smile, he felt

perturbed, alarmed, as if in presence of the supernatural; reality seemed a dream, and the dream-world reality; Monna Lisa, not the wife of Giocondo, the very ordinary Florentine citizen, but a phantom evoked by the will of the Master, a female semblance of Leonardo himself.

Lisa took her seat, and the white cat jumped on her lap; she stroked it with delicate fingers, and faint cracklings and sparks came from the silky fur. Leonardo began his work; but presently he laid it aside and sat silent, looking into her face with an intentness that no faintest shadow of change in her expression could have escaped.

"Madonna," he said at last, "you are preoccupied—troubled about something to-day."

Giovanni had observed that to-day she did not resemble the portrait.

"I am a little troubled," she replied; "Dianora ails, and I have been up with her the whole night."

"Then you are wearied, and the pose will try you. We will defer the sitting to another time."

"Nay, we cannot lose this delightful day! See the misty sunlight and the delicate shadows! It is *my* day!"

There was a short silence. Then she went on: "I knew you expected me. I was ready to come earlier; but I was kept. Madonna Sophonisba——"

"Who? Ah, I know. She with the voice of a fishwife and the scent of a perfumer's shop!"

Monna Lisa smiled quietly. "She had to tell me about the fête at the Palazzo Vecchio, given by

Argentina, wife of the *Gonfaloniere;* of the supper, the dresses, the lovers——"

"Ay, 't is not Dianora's indisposition has disturbed you, but this woman's senseless gossip. Strange case! Have you never noticed, madonna, how sometimes a single absurdity on an indifferent subject from an uninteresting person will throw a gloom over the mind, and afflict us more than our proper cares?"

She bent her head silently; it was clear they understood each other too well for words to be always necessary.

Leonardo again addressed himself to work.

"Tell me something!" she cried.

"What shall I tell you?"

She smiled. "Tell me about *The Realm of Venus.*"

The artist had certain favourite stories for La Gioconda: tales of travel, of natural phenomena, of plans for pictures. He knew them by heart, and would recite always in the same simple half-child-like words, accompanied by soft music, in his feminine voice, the old fable or cradle-tale. Andrea and Atalante took their instruments, and when they had executed the *motif* which invariably preluded *The Realm of Venus*, he began:

"The seafarers who live on the coasts of Cilicia tell of him who is destined to drown, that for a moment, during the most tremendous storms, he is permitted to behold the island of Cyprus, realm of the Goddess of Love. Around boil whirlwinds and

whirlpools, and the voices of the waters; and great in number are the navigators who, attracted by the splendour of that island, have lost ships upon its rocks. Many a gallant bark has there been dashed to pieces, many sunk for ever in the deep! Yonder on the coast lie piteous hulks, overgrown with seaweed, half buried by sand. Of one the prow juts exposed; of another the stern; of another the gaping beams of its side, like the blackened ribs of a corpse. So many are they, that there it looks like the Resurrection Day, when the sea shall give up its dead! But over the isle itself is a curtain of eternal azure, and the sun shines on flowery hills. And the stillness of the air is such, that when the priest swings the censer on the temple steps, the flame ascends to heaven straight, unwavering as the white columns and the giant cypresses mirrored in an untroubled lake lying inland, far from the shore. Only the streams that flow from that lake, and cascades leaping from one porphyry basin to another, trouble the solitude with their pleasant sound. Those drowning far at sea hear for a moment that soft murmur, and see the still lake of sweet waters, and the wind carries to them the perfume of myrtle and rose. Ever the more terrible the outer tempest, the profounder that calm in the island realm of the Cyprian."

He ceased: the strains of lute and viol died away, and that silence followed which is sweeter than any music. As if lulled by the words just spoken, as if caught away from actual life by the long hush, a

stranger to all things except the will of the artist, Monna Lisa, like calm and pure and fathomless water, looked into Leonardo's eyes with that mystic smile which was the very counterpart of his own. Giovanni Boltraffio, watching now one, now the other, thought of two mirrors, each reflecting, absorbing the other into infinity.

II

Next morning Leonardo was working in the Palazzo Vecchio at his *Battle of Anghiari*

In 1503, when he had come from Rome, he had received an order from Pietro Soderini, then the supreme authority in the republic, to paint some memorable battle on the wall of the new council-chamber. He chose the famous Florentine victory of 1440, over Niccolò Piccinino, the general of Filippo Visconti, Duke of Lombardy.

A portion of the picture was already completed: four horsemen struggling for possession of a standard—little more than a rag fluttering on a staff, its pole snapped and about to be shivered into pieces. Five hands have seized the shaft, and are pulling furiously in contrary directions. Sabres cross in the air; mouths are opened in a horrific yell. The distorted human faces are not less hideous than the jowls of the monstrous creatures on their helmets. The horses have been infected with the fury of their riders, and are rearing and striking each other with their forelegs, their

ears laid back, their eyeballs rolling and glaring, as they gnash their teeth and bite like tigers. Below, in a pool of blood, one man is killing another, clutching his hair and dashing his head against the ground, not noticing that in a moment they will both alike be trampled down by the advancing hoofs.

This was war in all its horror, the supreme folly of humanity, the "most bestial of madnesses," according to Leonardo's own expression, "which leaves no footprint unfilled with blood."

This morning the painter had scarcely taken his work in hand when he heard steps upon the brick floor; he recognised them, and frowned without looking up. It was Pietro Soderini, the *Gonfaloniere*.

Soderini required a precise account of every *soldo* advanced by the treasury for the purchase of wood, lac, chalk, paints, linseed oil, and other trifles. Never, when in the service of "tyrants," as the *Gonfaloniere* contemptuously called them, at the Court of Ludovico Sforza, or of Cæsar Borgia, had Leonardo been subjected to such petty interferences as here in the service of the free republic, in the region of civil equality.

"For what had you hoped?" asked the painter with a certain curiosity.

"We had hoped that your work would immortalise the warlike renown of the republic, and show the memorable exploits of our heroes; had hoped for something to elevate the soul, to give a

noble example of patriotism. I grant you that war is as you have shown it; but, I ask you, Messer Leonardo, why not ennoble and adorn it, and modify its extremes? for the great thing is 'moderation in all things!' I may be mistaken, but to my thinking the painter's true business is to benefit the people by instructing them."

He had now touched on his favourite theme, and with brightened eyes he talked on; his monotonous voice had the ceaseless trickle of water, wearing away a stone. The painter scarcely replied; though, curious to know what this worthy citizen really thought on the subject of art, he listened at intervals with some attention. He felt as if he had gone into a dark and narrow room, crowded with people, and with an absolutely stifling atmosphere.

"Art which has no profit for the people," said Messer Pietro, "is merely an amusement for the rich, a distraction for the idle, a luxury for tyrants. You agree, my good sir?"

"Certainly," assented Leonardo, and he continued, sarcastic purpose scarce visible in the twinkle of his eyes. "Permit me, sir, to suggest a practical method of terminating our perennial debate. Let the citizens of the Florentine Republic assemble in this very chamber, and take a vote on the question whether or no my picture be moral—that is, popular. There would be great advantage in this course. The question would be settled with mathematical certainty by counting heads;

for the voice of the people is, as you are aware, the voice of God."

Soderini weighed the suggestion. He was so impressed by the virtue of the black and white balls used for voting, that it never occurred to him a mock could be made at the mystery. Presently, however, he understood, and fixing his eyes on the painter, stared in blank astonishment, almost terror. Yet he quickly recovered himself. Artists are known to be persons unreliable and devoid of common-sense, and it ill behoved him to take offence at this painter fellow's gibe.

Messer Pietro did not pursue the subject; in the tone of a superior addressing a dependent, he mentioned that Michelangelo Buonarotti had received an order to paint the second wall of the council chamber, and curtly took his leave. Leonardo followed him with his eyes. Sleek, grey, with crooked legs and a bent back, he seemed even more closely than usual to resemble a rat.

III

On leaving the Palazzo Vecchio, Leonardo paused in the piazza before Michelangelo's *David*. It stood as if on guard, a giant of white marble, relieved against the background of dark stone. Young, thin, naked, the veins swollen in his right hand which held the sling, his left arm was raised in front of his breast, the stone within the hand. His brows were knit, his gaze far away, like one taking aim. The curls upon his low forehead

David (Michelangelo, Florence).

Photo by Anderson.

seemed already the garland of victory. Leonardo remembered the description in the Book of Kings; and seeing him stand there where Savonarola had been burned, he thought of the prophet Fra Girolamo had desired in vain, the hero for whom Machiavelli was still waiting.

In this work of his rival's Leonardo recognised the expression of a soul great as his own, but eternally opposed to it; opposed as action is to contemplation, passion to apathy, storm to tranquillity. This alien force attracted him; he felt the inevitable fascination of something new, the desire to come close to it, to study, and understand it.

Two years earlier, among the building stones of Santa Maria del Fiore, lay a huge block of white marble, spoilt by an unskilled sculptor. The best masters had refused it, thinking it no longer good for anything. It had been offered to Leonardo himself, and with his usual slowness he had meditated, measured, calculated, hesitated. Then came another, twenty-three years younger than he, who had undertaken the task without misgiving; with incredible rapidity, working by night as well as by day, he had made this giant in two years and one month. Leonardo had worked for six years at the clay of his *Colossus*; he dared not think how long he would have required for a marble statue like this *David*.

The Florentines had proclaimed Michelangelo Leonardo's rival in the art of sculpture, and the

young man had not hesitated to accept his challenge. Now it seemed he was about to place himself in competition with the older master as a painter also. He had yet hardly taken a brush in his hand, but with a daring which might seem presumption, he was about to paint the second war-picture in the council chamber.

Leonardo had met his youthful rival with goodwill and every consideration; but Michelangelo hated him with all the fire of his impetuous nature. Leonardo's calm he fancied contempt: he listened to calumnies, he sought pretexts for quarrels, he seized every occasion to damage his rival. When the *David* was finished the best painters and sculptors were invited by the Signoria to discuss where it should be placed. Leonardo agreed with Giuliano da San Gallo, the architect, that the most suitable position would be under the Loggia de' Priori, and not, as others suggested, in front of the Palazzo della Signoria. Michelangelo swore that Leonardo, prompted by envy, wished his rival's work hidden in a corner where no one could properly see it.

Discussions on abstract questions were at this time much the vogue, and on one occasion a company, including the brothers Pollaiuoli, the aged Botticelli, Filippino Lippi, and Lorenzo di Credi, assembled in Leonardo's studio to debate whether sculpture or painting held the higher place among the arts. Leonardo quickly, with a whimsical expression, gave his opinion thus:

"The farther art is removed from a handicraft the nearer it approaches perfection. The major distinction between the two arts lies in the fact that painting demands greater effort of mind, sculpture greater effort of body. The shape, contained like a kernel in the block of marble, is slowly set free by the sculptor's blows of chisel and mallet, needing the exertion of all his bodily powers. Great fatigue ensues, the labourer is drenched with sweat, which mingling with dust becomes a miry crust upon his garments; his face is smeared and covered with white like a baker's, his studio is filled with chips. Whereas the painter, perfectly calm, in elegant habiliments, seated at ease in his chair, plies a light brush and manipulates pleasant paints. His house is clean, and quiet, so that his toil can be sweetened by converse, or music, or reading, undisturbed by hammerings or scrapings."

These words came to the ears of Michelangelo, who imagined them aimed at himself. He took occasion to make venomous reply:

"Let this Messer da Vinci, a kitchen-wench's bastard, be ashamed of dirty work; I, the heir of an old and honourable house, despise neither sweat nor mire. The dispute is foolish, for all the arts are equal, proceeding from one source, aiming at one goal. He who maintains that painting is nobler than sculpture knows no more of either than my serving-maid."

He set to work with feverish energy on his pic-

ture for the council chamber, wishing to overtake his rival—a feat by no means difficult. His subject was an incident in the Pisan campaign: a sudden attack by the enemy while the soldiers were bathing. The men hurry to the bank, scramble out of the pleasant waves, draw on their sweated and dusty clothes, don their cuirasses and helmets, which are burning hot under the fiery sunshine. Michelangelo thus showed war as a contrast to Leonardo's representation: not as "the most bestial of madnesses," but as the performance of hard and manful duty to the denial of ease and pleasure; as the struggle of heroes for the greatness and glory of their country.

The Florentines watched the growth of the two pictures and the rivalry between the artists with all the keenness of spectators at a raree-show; and as strife unconnected with politics seemed to them tasteless as broth without salt, they affirmed that Michelangelo was for the republic against the Medici, Leonardo for the Medici against the republic. The artistic duel now became intelligible to everybody; the town was divided into two parties; and men, to whom art was a sealed book, declared themselves the adherents of one or other of the two artists whose works had become the ensigns of hostile camps. Stones were thrown secretly at the *David*; the rich accused the poor of this outrage, the demagogues accused the substantial burghers; the artists, the pupils; and Buonarotti, in the presence of the *Gonfaloniere*,

asserted that ruffians had been hired by Leonardo to damage his statue.

One day Leonardo, working at his portrait in the presence of Boltraffio and Salaino, said to Monna Lisa:

"Could I but come to speech with Messer Michelangelo, face to face, as I speak with you, madonna, all would be explained, and no trace would remain of this stupid quarrel. He would learn that I am not his enemy, and that there is no man living could love him better than I."

Madonna Lisa shook her head.

"Nay, Messer Leonardo, he would not understand you."

"Such a man could not fail to understand. The mischief is that he is diffident and has too little self-confidence. He fears and tortures himself and is jealous, because he does not yet know his own strength. It is folly in him. I would reassure him. What has he to fear in me? I have seen his sketch for the *Soldiers Bathing* and, believe me, madonna, I was astounded, and could scarce believe my own eyes. No one can conceive the value of this young man, nor what he will rise to. Even now he is not only my equal, but stronger than I. Deny it not, madonna, for I speak what I know to be true: he is my superior."

She smiled, reflecting his expression like an image in a mirror.

One day in Santa Maria del Carmine, in the Cappella Brancacci, where were the famous frescoes

of Tommaso Masaccio, the school of all the great masters, he saw a lad, scarcely more than a boy, studying and copying as he had done himself in his youth. He wore a paint-stained old black frock, clean but coarse and homespun linen. He was tall and willowy, with a slight neck, very white and long, delicate as a girl's. His face was oval, clear cut, and pale, with a somewhat sensuous beauty, and great dark eyes like those of the Umbrian peasant women from whom Perugino painted his Madonnas, eyes with no depth of thought, deep and void as the sky. Leonardo saw the youth a second time in the Sala del Papa at Santa Maria Novella, where his own cartoon for the *Battle of Anghiari* was exhibited. This the lad was studying and copying with no less care than he had bestowed on Masaccio's frescoes. He evidently knew Leonardo by sight, but did not venture to speak to him.

The Master addressed him; and then hurriedly, excitedly, and with many blushes, half-presumptuous yet childishly artless, the boy confessed that he looked on Leonardo as his master, as the greatest of all Italian masters, whose shoe's latchet Michelangelo Buonarotti was not worthy to unloose.

Leonardo examined his drawings, and after further converse, on other occasions, became convinced that here was a great master of the future.

Sensitive and responsive as an echo to all voices, submissive to influence as a woman, he at present

Frescoes by Masaccio in the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine, (Florence).

Photo by Anderson.

imitated both Perugino and Pinturicchio (with whom he had recently been working in the library at Siena), and also Leonardo; but under this immaturity the latter found a freshness of feeling in him superior to any he had met. And the lad seemed to have already fathomed by guesswork the deepest mysteries of art and life; had surmounted the greatest obstacles as if involuntarily, lightly, by chance, almost in play. Every gift seemed to have been bestowed on him freely; he knew no searchings of heart, no weary toil, no hesitation, no despairing efforts, no hopeless puzzles, such as had always been to Leonardo an incubus and a curse. And when the Master spoke to him of the need for patient study of nature, and of the laws of painting, the youth fixed on him soft wondering eyes, and, it was evident, listened merely out of reverence for the great man's opinion.

One day he made an observation which surprised Leonardo by its depth:

"I have noticed," he said, "that while one is painting one should not think. Everything then turns out better."

It seemed as if this youth's whole being was a proof that the perfect harmony of reason and feeling, of love and science, which the Master sought so ardently, did not, nor could not exist. And in face of the modest and careless frankness which shone in those unanxious eyes, Leonardo felt greater doubt of the work of his own whole life, greater doubt of the future destiny of art, than had

ever tormented him when confronted by the rivalry and scorn of Michelangelo.

At one of their first meetings Leonardo had asked the lad his name, parentage, and native place.

"I come from Urbino," he replied; "and my father is Giovanni Sanzio the painter, and my name, Raphael."

IV

The evening before Leonardo's departure from Florence to mend a dam which had burst on the river Arno, he was returning from a visit to Machiavelli, who had alarmed him by his admissions with regard to Soderini.

He was crossing the bridge of the Santa Trinità, towards the Via Tornabuoni. The hour was late, and few people were about; after a hot day a shower had freshened the air. From the river came the sharp perfume which water acquires in the warmth of summer; the moon was rising behind the dark hill of San Miniato. On the bank near the Ponte Vecchio a cluster of very ancient houses, with uneven balconies and wooden supports, were reflected in the dull green water. Behind Monte Albano glittered a single star. The outline of Florence was cut against the clear sky like a golden capital letter in some ancient manuscript; an outline unique in the world, familiar to Leonardo as the outline of a human face. To the north rose the ancient belfry of Santa Croce, near

The Hill of San Miniato, Florence.

Photo by Alinari

it the straight slender stem of the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio; then Giotto's marble campanile, and the red cupola of Santa Maria del Fiore, like the gigantic expanding blossom of the purple lily, the flower of Florence on her standards and escutcheons. All Florence, bathed in moonlight, seemed a huge silver flower.

Leonardo noted that every city has its own especial perfume; that of Florence was a mingling of the scent of iris flowers, and the faint odour of dust and damp and old varnish which belongs to ancient pictures.

His thoughts veered to her who was becoming their constant preoccupation—Monna Lisa Gioconda. He knew scarce more of her life than did Giovanni his pupil; it was less an annoyance than a perpetual astonishment to him to reflect that she had a husband—Messer Francesco, so tall and lean, with a wart on his cheek; thick eyebrows; a positive soul; whose talk was of Sicilian cattle and the tax upon sheepskins. There were moments in which Leonardo rejoiced in her ethereal charm, which seemed above common humanity, yet was more real to him than aught belonging to everyday life. There were other moments in which he acutely felt the beauty of the living woman.

Lisa was not one of those celebrated by the poetasters as *dotte eroine* (learned heroines). She never displayed her knowledge of books; only by chance he found out that she read both Latin and Greek. She spoke so simply that many imagined her stu-

pid. But Leonardo found in her what is most rare, especially among women, instinctive wisdom. Sometimes by a chance sentence she would reveal herself so near, so akin to him in spirit, that he felt her his one and eternal friend, the sister of his soul. At these moments he would fain have overpassed the magic circle which divides contemplation from life; but such desires he quenched at once. Was this love which united them? Platonic ravings, languid sighs of ideal lovers, syrupy sonnets in the Petrarchan style, had never excited in him anything but amusement or boredom. Equally alien to his nature was the passion which most men call love. Just as he ate no meat, because it seemed to him repulsive, so he refrained from women, because all material possession—in marriage or outside it—seemed to him coarse. He avoided it as he avoided the shambles, neither blaming nor approving, acknowledging the law of natural struggle for hunger or for love, but refusing to take any part in it himself, and obeying a purer law of chastity and love.

Yet even if he had loved her, what more perfect union with the beloved could he have wished than in this secret and mystic intercourse, in the creation of this immortal image, this new being, born of them both, as a child of its parents, in which he and she were one? Nevertheless he felt that even in this mystic union, stainless as it was, there was danger—it might be greater danger than in the bond of ordinary fleshly love. They walked on the

verge of a precipice where none had walked before, resisting the vertigo and the fatal attraction of the abyss. Between them were simple words, vague and uncompleted phrases, through which their secret showed as the sun shines through the morning mist. At times he thought, What if the mist should scatter, and the blinding sun shine out which kills mystery, dissolves all phantoms? What if he or she should prove unequal to the strain, should overstep the magic circle, materialise imagination into fact, contemplation into life? Had he the right to test a human soul, the soul of his lifelong friend, his spiritual sister, as he tested the laws of mechanics, the structure of planets, the action of poisons? Would she not revolt, cast him from her with contempt and hatred?

Again at times he fancied he was subjecting her to a slow and terrible death. Her submissiveness alarmed him; it seemed limitless, like his own eternal search for knowledge, the delicate yet penetrating scrutiny to which he subjected her. Sooner or later he would have to decide what she was to him, a woman or a spirit. He had been hoping that temporary absence would postpone this inevitable decision, and for this reason was glad to be leaving Florence.

But now that the moment had come, that separation was imminent, he realised that he had been mistaken, and that instead of deferring, his departure must hasten the decision.

Absorbed in these thoughts, he did not notice

that he had wandered into a lonely blind alley, and on looking about him did not at once recognise where he was. Giotto's campanile appearing above the houses showed he was in the vicinity of the cathedral. One side of the narrow street was lost in blackest shadow, the other was white under the rays of the moon. A distant light glowed red. It came from one of the *loggie* characteristic of Florence, with a balcony and semi-circular arches on slender pillars; a company in masks and cloaks were singing a serenade to the gentle tinkling of a lute.

It was the old love-song, composed by Lorenzo Il Magnifico, which had once sounded in the carnival procession; a melancholy yet joyous melody, pleasant to Leonardo's ears because he had known it in his youth.

"Quanto è bella giovinezza!
Ma sen fugge tuttavia
Chi vuol esser lieto sia
Di doman non v'è certezza."

(Fair-fleeting Youth must snatch at happiness:
He knows not if to-morrow curse or bless.)

The last line lingered sadly in his ears with mournful foreboding.

Already on the threshold of old age, and approaching darkness and solitude, had not Fate sent him at last a living soul, a kindred soul? Must he repulse it? must he deny it? sacrifice life for

contemplation, as he had so often done before? renounce the near for the far away, the real for the ideal? Which was he to choose, the true and living and mortal Gioconda or the immortal, which had no material existence? They were equally dear to him, yet he must choose between them; choose at once, for her sake. But his will was weak. He could arrive at no decision, and wandered on aimlessly through the streets, debating, debating with himself.

Presently he reached the house of Pietro Martelli, where he lodged. The doors were shut, the lights extinguished. He raised the hammer hung on a chain, and knocked. The porter did not come. Repeated blows were only answered by echoes from the sounding arches of the stone staircase. Echoes died away and silence succeeded, seeming the more profound for the brightness of the moonlight.

A clock boomed from a neighbouring tower. The heavy measured clanging told of the silent and dreadful flight of time, of the darkness and loneliness of age, of the past which could never return. And long did the last clang vibrate in the moonlit stillness, quivering on the air, now weakening, now strengthening again in ever widening waves of sound, as if repeating—

"Di doman non v'è certezza."

V

The next day, at her habitual hour, Monna Lisa

came to the studio for the first time unaccompanied. She knew it was their last interview. It was a brilliant morning, and Leonardo lowered the canvas curtain to produce that dim and tender light, transparent as submarine shadows, which gave her face its greatest charm.

They were alone.

He kept working on in silence, calm and absorbed, forgetting his thoughts of the previous night, forgetting the parting, the inevitable choice. Past and future had alike vanished from his memory; time had come to a standstill; it seemed as if she had always sat, and would ever thus sit before him, with that calm strange smile. What he could not do in life he did by imagination: he blended the two images in one—mingled the reality and its reflection—the living woman and the immortal.

He had now the sense of a great deliverance. He no longer either pitied her or feared her. He knew her submissiveness, that she would accept all, endure all; die, perhaps, but never revolt. And momently he looked at her with that curiosity which had taken him to the execution of the condemned, that he might watch the last shudders of fear on the dying faces.

Suddenly he fancied that a strange shadow, as of an unbidden thought, which he had not evoked, which he wished away, appeared upon her countenance, like the cloud of human breath upon the surface of a mirror. To preserve her, to recall her

anew to the Type within the fatidic circle, to banish from her this human shadow, he related gravely, like a magician pronouncing an incantation, one of his mystic tales.

"Unable to resist the desire of beholding new forms, the secret creations of nature, I at length reached the cavern, and there at the entrance stood still in terror. I stooped, the left hand on the right knee, and shading my eyes with my hands to accustom myself to the darkness, I presently took heart and entered, and moved forward for several steps. Then, frowning, straining my sight to the utmost, I unwittingly changed my course and wandered hither and thither in the darkness, feeling my way and groping after the definite. But the obscurity was overpowering, and when I had passed some time in it, Fear and Curiosity contended most mightily within me: fear of searching that dark cavern, and curiosity after its secret."

He was silent. The unwonted shadow lay still upon her face.

"Which of the two feelings gained the day?" La Gioconda murmured.

"Curiosity."

"And you learned the stupendous secret?"

"I learned . . . what could be learned."

"And will reveal it to men?"

"I would not, nor could not, reveal all. But I would inspire them also with curiosity strong enough to vanquish fear."

"*And if curiosity be not enough,* Messer Leo-

nardo?" she said slowly, an unwonted fire in her eyes; "if something further, a profounder feeling, were needed to lay bare the cavern's last and greatest treasure?"

And she turned toward him a smile he had never seen before.

"What more is needed?" he asked.

She was silent. Just then a slender blinding ray shone through a rent in the curtain; the dimness vanished; the mystery, the clear shadows, tender as distant music, fled.

"You leave to-morrow?" she said suddenly.

"No. To-night."

"I, too, am soon departing."

The artist looked at her steadily, attempted speech, and said nothing. He divined her meaning: that she would not stay in Florence without him.

"Messer Francesco," she continued, "goes presently for three months to Calabria. I have asked him to take me with him."

He frowned. This sunshine was not to his mind; the fountain had been ghostly white; now it had taken the rainbow hues of life. Leonardo felt that he was returning to life, timid, weak, pitiable.

"No matter," said Monna Lisa, "draw closer the curtain. It is early yet. I am not tired."

"I have painted enough," he said, throwing down his brush.

"You will not finish my portrait?"

"Why not?" he cried hastily, as if alarmed. "Will you not come to me when you return?"

"I will come. But shall I be the same? You have told me that faces, especially the faces of women, quickly change."

"I long to finish it. But sometimes to me it seems impossible."

"Impossible?" wondered La Gioconda. "Ay, they tell me you finish nothing because you are always seeking the impossible."

In these words he fancied a tender reproach.

"The moment has come!" he thought.

She rose and said with her usual calm:

"Farewell, Messer Leonardo. I wish you a good journey." He also had risen, and looking at her he saw again helpless entreaty and reproach on her face. He knew that this moment was irrevocable for both—final and solemn as death. He felt he must break this pregnant silence, yet no words came to him. The more he forced his will to find a solution, the more he was conscious of his own powerlessness and the profundity of the abyss which must divide them. Monna Lisa still smiled her quiet smile; that calmness, that brightness, seemed to him now the smile of the dead. Intolerable pity filled his heart and weakened him still more.

She stretched out her hand; he took it and kissed it for the first time since he had known her. As he did so she bent quickly, and he felt that La Gioconda touched his hair with her lips.

"May God have you in his keeping," she said simply.

When he recovered from his wonder—she was gone. Around him was the dead silence of a summer afternoon, more menacing than midnight. Again he heard the heavy measured clanging of the clock, telling of the irremediable flight of time, of the darkness and loneliness of age, of the past which can return no more. And as the last vibrations died away the words of the plaintive love-song echoed in his ears:

"Di doman non v'è certezza."
"*And count not on the day to come.*"

VI

Learning that Messer Giocondo was not returning from Calabria till October, Leonardo deferred his return to Florence for ten days that he might not reach the city till Madonna Lisa was there. He counted the hours till that moment should arrive; superstitious dread oppressed his heart when he remembered that accident might easily prolong the separation. He strove not to think; he asked no one for news lest he should hear something disappointing.

At last the day came, and he reached Florence early in the morning. Autumnal, damp, and dull, the city yet seemed especially fair. It spoke to him of La Gioconda. It was one of *her* days;

misty, transparent, with subdued light, as of sunlight seen through water.

He no longer asked himself how they would meet, what he should say, nor how he must act that they might part no more, that he might keep her for ever as his only friend, the sister of his soul.

"Things turn out best when one does not think too much. The great thing is, not to think," he said to himself, quoting the lad Raphael. "I will question her; and she will tell me all which that day we left unsaid; she will explain what more than curiosity is necessary if one is to discover the marvel of the cavern."

Gladness filled his soul as if he were a boy of sixteen with his life before him; yet deep down under this gladness there lingered a half unconscious presentiment of mishap.

In the evening he visited Machiavelli, intending to go to Messer Giocondo's house next day. Impatience, however, overcame him, and he decided to call at once and ask for news, from the porter, of Madonna Lisa's safe arrival. He went down the Via Tornabuoni towards the Ponte Santa Trinità, the same route, though in the opposite direction, which he had followed the night before his departure. The weather had suddenly changed, as often happens in Florence on autumn evenings. The north wind, piercing as a knife, blew down the valley of the Mugnone, and the crest of the Mugello was whitened with snow. In the town it was raining; but just above the horizon there remained

a narrow strip of clear sky, and from it the sun suddenly burst forth, flooding the wet streets and shining roofs and the faces of the passers-by with a harsh yellow light. The rain seemed like copper dust, and the glass of distant windows glowed like live coals.

Near the bridge and opposite the church of Santa Trinità, in the angle formed by the river bank and the Via Tornabuoni, rose the imposing Palazzo degli Spini, built of large warm-grey stones, with barred lancet windows and castellated roof like a fortress. Down below was the customary row of stone benches, where the citizens congregated to tell the news, to sun or to shade themselves, to play at dice or draughts. There was a loggia at the other side of the palace, looking out upon the Arno.

As he passed, Leonardo saw in this loggia a group of persons, strangers to him for the most part, disputing so vehemently that they did not notice the storm.

"Messer Leonardo! come hither and resolve our question!" they called to him. He stopped. The dispute was about certain lines in the thirty-fourth canto of Dante's *Inferno*, where Lucifer is described buried breast-high in the ice at the very bottom of the accursed Pit.

The matter was expounded to Leonardo by one of the disputants, a rich old wool merchant. The artist, however, was but half attending, for his eyes were fixed on a man coming along the Lun-

garno Acciaioli. This person walked heavily, shambling like a bear; he was bent and bony, with a large head, black hair, and ill-shaped beard; his clothes were poor and carelessly thrown on. He had a broad-browed heavy face, with projecting ears and a broken nose. His small eyes dilated and glowed strangely under excitement, and much night-work had reddened his eyelids. Indeed, he was said to work preferably in underground darkness, with a small round lamp attached to his forehead, like a new Cyclops. It was Michelangelo.

"Give us your opinion," urged the disputants of Leonardo.

"I have heard," replied the painter, "that Messer Buonarotti is a student of the great Alighieri. Ask him; he will answer your question better than I."

For Leonardo had always hoped that his difference with Michelangelo would die a natural death; and he was anxious for an occasion which would bring them to speech together.

The younger man, hearing his name pronounced, stopped and raised his eyes. He was reserved and shy, even to wildness, dreading the stare of strangers, and fancying that they scorned his ugliness, which he himself was never able to forget. Now he looked suspiciously at the company in the loggia; but when he saw Leonardo's smile, and his piercing glance bent down upon him, for the older man was much the taller of the two, shyness changed into

rage. He grew pale and red by turns; words choked him; but at last he blurted out:

"Explain it yourself, most intelligent of sages, sold to the Lombards! Books are your proper pastime; you who spent sixteen years trying to hatch a clay horse, and when you tried to cast it in bronze threw up the task in despair." He knew he was speaking outrageously; but such was his fury that no words seemed to him sufficiently insulting to hurl at his rival.

Leonardo made no reply; he looked the other full in the face, and the bystanders also were silent, watching the two men.

Before the violence of Buonarotti, Leonardo's calm almost feminine smile, tinged with sadness, suggested weakness. But he himself remembered Monna Lisa's words, that Michelangelo would never pardon him for his gift of that quietness which is mightier than storm.

Michelangelo finding no more words waved his hand, turned quickly, and went on his way, with his shambling gait, his dull unconscious habit of growling, his bent head and bowed shoulders, upon which seemed to rest some superhuman burden. Soon he disappeared as if dissolved into the turbid copper-coloured rain and the wild and threatening sunlight.

Leonardo walked on. On the bridge one of the company in the loggia of the Palazzo Spini overtook him—a little man with the aspect of a Jew though a pure-blooded Florentine, known to Leo-

Michelangelo (by himself, Florence).

Photo by Alinari.

nardo as a scandal-monger. The painter crossed the bridge, the other running by his side, talking of Michelangelo, and trying to force Leonardo into some adverse criticism of his rival, which no doubt he intended to repeat at the earliest opportunity. Leonardo, however, refused to be drawn into this trap, and remained silent.

The intruder was not to be shaken off.

"Tell me, Messere," he said, "have you yet finished your portrait of La Gioconda?"

"I have not," answered the painter. "Why are you interested?"

"Nay, I was only considering the matter. For three years you have laboured at one picture, and you say it is still incomplete. But to us ignorant amateurs it seems already perfection, and we can conceive of nothing further to be done."

And he smiled obsequiously. Leonardo would have liked to take the little man by the collar and fling him into the river.

"And what will you do now?" continued the irrepressible one. "But perhaps you have not heard, Messer Leonardo?"

Through his aversion the artist felt a spasm of dread. The other had evidently something on his tongue; his eyes danced, his hands shook. He seemed like some noxious insect.

"Oh, *Santo Iddio benedetto!*" he exclaimed; "forsooth you only returned to Florence this morning, so the news may not have reached you. Poor Messer Giocondo! to be thrice widowed! Conceive

what bad luck! 'T is now a month since Madonna Lisa, by the will of Heaven, expired!"

Darkness fell upon Leonardo's eyes; for a moment it seemed to him he must swoon. But the keen inquisitive gaze of his tormentor helped him to a superhuman effort of self-control; he turned pale, but his face remained inscrutable. The other, disappointed, presently took his leave. Left alone, Leonardo gradually recovered his composure. His first thought was that the busybody had lied; inventing the evil tidings on purpose to see what effect they would produce on the artist whose name had long been whispered as a lover of La Gioconda. It was incredible that she could really be dead.

Before nightfall, however, he had learned all. Madonna Lisa, victim, said some, of a contagious malady of the throat, had died at the obscure town of Lagonero, on the return journey from Calabria to Florence.

VII

The attempt to divert the Arno from Pisa ended in disaster. Floods destroyed the works, and turned the blooming lowland into a pestilential swamp, where the workmen died of malaria. The labour, the money, the lives had been expended for naught: the Ferrarese engineers threw the blame upon Soderini, Machiavelli, and Leonardo. They were placed under a ban, and their acquaintances turned from them in the streets. Niccolò fell ill of vexation.

Two years before this, Leonardo's father, Ser Pietro da Vinci, notary of the palace of the Podestà, had died at the age of eighty.

In the matter of inheritance Ser Pietro had frequently expressed an intention of placing Leonardo on an equal footing with his legitimate sons. They refused to execute his will. Leonardo's affairs were at this time much involved, and he was induced to assent to the proposal of one of the Hebrew usurers, from whom he had borrowed on the security of his expectations, that he should sell him his claim on the paternal inheritance. A lawsuit followed which lasted for six years. Taking advantage of Leonardo's unpopularity, his brothers poured oil on the flames, accusing him of sorcery, atheism, high treason during his service with Cæsar Borgia, and violation of tombs by digging up corpses for dissection; they even insulted the memory of his dead mother, Caterina, and revived the twenty-year-old slander, accusing him of vice.

In addition to all these trials was added the failure of the picture in the council chamber. Notwithstanding his experience with regard to the *Cenacolo*, he had used oil paints also for the *Battle of Anghiari*, though with what he believed an improved method. When the work was half finished he attempted to hasten the fixing of the paint in the plaster by means of a great fire in a brazier before the picture. But the heat acted only on the lower part of the surface; the varnish and paint higher up would not dry.

After many fruitless experiments he realised that the second attempt at wall-painting in oil was unsuccessful as the first, and that the *Battle* would fade away as surely as the *Last Supper*.

Once more, in Michelangelo's words, he was obliged to throw up his task in despair.

The picture troubled him more than the Pisan canal or the fraternal lawsuit. Soderini had harassed him with demands for mercantile exactness in the carrying out of the order for the fresco, pressed for completion within a given time, threatened him with penalties, finally accused him openly of having misappropriated public money. Yet when Leonardo, having borrowed from his friends, proposed to restore all he had received from the treasury, Messer Pietro refused to accept his offer, and meanwhile was not ashamed to write to the Seigneur Charles d'Amboise, governor of Lombardy, who was negotiating for the transfer of the painter from Florence to Milan:

"The conduct of Leonardo da Vinci has not been honourable: for having received a large sum for the execution of a great work, he abandoned it when he had completed but a very little, and in this matter had acted as a traitor to the republic."

One winter night Leonardo sat alone in his working room. The wind howled in the chimney, the walls shook, the candle flickered, the stuffed bird, suspended from a wooden bar, swayed as if attempting to fly; above the bookshelf the familiar spider ran in alarm about his web. Drops of rain

battered the window like the knocks of one wishing to enter.

After a day spent in working for his livelihood, Leonardo felt exhausted, as by a night of fever. He tried to employ himself by scientific study, by drawing a caricature, by reading; but everything fell from his hands. He had no inclination to sleep, and the whole night was before him.

He looked at the piles of books, at the crucibles, the retorts, the bottles containing monstrosities preserved in spirit; at the brass quadrants, the globes, the apparatus for the study of mechanics, astronomy, physics, hydraulics, optics, and anatomy. An unwonted repugnance to them all filled his soul. Was not he the fellow of yonder old spider in the dark corner above the mouldy books, the human bones, the limbs of lifeless machines? What was left to him, what lay between him and death, between him and utter oblivion except certain sheets of paper, which he was covering with writing that no one could read? And he remembered his happiness when as a child he had climbed the heights of Monte Albano, had seen the flocks of cranes, had smelt the freshness of spring, had gazed at the fair city of Florence, lying in the sunlight haze like an amethyst, so small that it could be framed between two branches of juniper. Yes, he had been happy; thinking of nothing, knowing nothing.

Was the whole labour of his life a mockery? Was Love, after all, *not* the daughter of Knowledge?

He listened to the howling, the shrieking, the roaring of the storm, and he remembered Machiavelli's words: "The most fearful thing in life is not poverty nor care, sickness nor sorrow, nor death itself. It is weariness of spirit."

And still the inhuman voice of the night wind spoke of things unavoidable yet unintelligible to the mind of man; of the loneliness, the blackness of utter darkness on the bosom of old Chaos, mother of all that is; of the boundless weariness of the spirit of the world. Leonardo rose, took a candle, went into the next room, uncovered a picture standing on an easel and veiled with a heavy drapery like a shroud. It was the portrait of Monna Lisa Gioconda.

He had not looked at it since their parting. Now it seemed that he saw it for the first time; such vigour of life was in it that he trembled before his own creation. He remembered old-world traditions of magic portraits which, if pierced by a needle, caused the death of the living originals. In this case had he not done the contrary, taken life from the living woman to give it to the dead?

It was all vivid and exact, to the last fold of her dress, to the little stars of the delicate embroidery garnishing the opening round her neck. It seemed as if the white bosom heaved, the blood beat warm in the arteries, the expression of the face changed. Yet was she spectral, far off, alien; more antique, in her deathless youth, than the cliffs in the picture background—strange, sky-blue rocks, like

stalactites, that seemed visions of a world long extinct. Ah! and the waves of her hair fell from under the dark transparent veil, by the same laws of divine mechanics as fell the waves of water in the cataract! It was only now, when he had lost her, that he knew the charm of Monna Lisa. Hers was the charm which he had sought in nature; the secret of the universe was the secret of this woman, whom he had loved.

And it was no longer he who was putting her to the test, but she who was trying him. What meant the gaze of those eyes, reflecting his own soul? Was she repeating what she had said at their last meeting—telling him that more than curiosity is needed if the most wondrous secret of the cavern is to be discovered? Or was this the alien smile of perfect knowledge with which the dead look at the living? For the first time he realised that she was truly dead. Could he or could he not have saved her? Never before had he looked into the face of Death so directly, so near. Terror turned his soul to ice. He drew back from the horror: for the first time in his life he did not wish to *know*.

With a hasty and furtive movement he dropped the shroud again over the canvas, and turned away.

*

In the succeeding spring, by the good offices of Charles d'Amboise, Leonardo was freed from his engagements to the Florentine Republic, and able

to return to Milan. Now, as twenty-five years before, he was glad to leave his home, and to see the snowy crest of the Alps rising above the great plain of Lombardy. Now, as then, he was an exile, cast out from his country and his home.

BOOK XV

THE HOLY INQUISITION—1506-1513

"Know all, but be known of none."
BASIL THE GNOSTIC.

I

IN the year 1507 Leonardo definitely entered the service of Louis XII., established himself at Milan, and went no more to Florence, except for small matters of business.

Four years passed uneventfully.

Towards the close of 1511, Giovanni Boltraffio, who was now a master of repute, was working at a wall-painting in the new Church of San Maurizio. It belonged to the ancient foundation of the Monastero Maggiore, and was built on the ruins of the Roman circus. Beside it, enclosed by a high fence and abutting on the Via Della Vigna, was a neglected garden, and the once splendid but now deserted and ruined palace of the Counts of Carmagnola. The nuns of the Monastero Maggiore had let this house and garden to Messer Galeotto Sacrobosco, the old alchemist, who had lately returned to Milan with Cassandra his niece. Their cottage by the Porta Vercellina having been de-

stroyed at the time of the first French invasion, the pair had wandered for nine years in Greece, the islands of the Archipelago, Asia Minor, and Syria. Strange tales were told of them: Galeotto had found the philosopher's stone; he had appropriated vast sums lent him by the Devâtdâr of Syria for experiments, and had fled for his life. Monna Cassandra, by the help of the devil, had found treasure on the site of an ancient Phœnician temple; she had bewitched, drugged, and plundered a wealthy merchant at Constantinople; at any rate the pair had left Milan beggars, and had returned rich—that much was certain. Pupil of Demetrius Chalcondylas, and also of Sidonia the witch, Cassandra appeared now a devout daughter of the Church. She observed all fasts and ceremonies, she attended the holy offices, and by her charities had acquired the favour not only of the sisters of the Monastero Maggiore, but that of the archbishop himself. Evil tongues, however, declared that her religion was a pretence, that she was still a pagan, that she and her uncle had only escaped the Inquisition by flight from Rome, and that sooner or later she was certain to be burned at the stake. Messer Galeotto still reverenced Leonardo and considered him his master in the occult wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus. The alchemist had collected many rare books in the course of his travels; for the most part those of Alexandrian scholars of Ptolemaic times. Leonardo borrowed these sometimes, and generally sent Giovanni to

fetch them, since he was working close to the alchemist's house. As had happened before, Giovanni fell under the spell of Cassandra, and his visits became more frequent. At first she spoke to him guardedly, acting up to her part of repentant sinner, and expressing a desire to take the veil. Little by little she dismissed her fears, and became confidential. They recalled their meetings of ten years ago, when they had both been little more than children—the lonely terrace above the quiet Cantarana, the walls of the Convent of St. Radegonda; especially that sultry evening when she had spoken to him of the Resurrection of the Gods, and had invited him to the Witches' Sabbath. Now she lived as a recluse; was ill, or pretended to be so; and when she was not at church she hid herself in a remote secluded dark chamber, where the windows looked out on the neglected garden, densely shadowed by cypress trees. The room was furnished like a library or a museum. Here were the antiquities she had brought from the East: fragments of statues, dog-headed gods of black syenite from Egypt, mysterious stones upon which was incised the magic word *Abraxas*, signifiying the three hundred and sixty-five celestial spheres of the Gnostics; precious Byzantine parchments, which time had rendered hard as ivory; fragments from Greek manuscripts, hopelessly lost; earthen shards, with cuneiform Assyrian inscriptions; books of the Persian magi, clasped with iron; Memphian papyri, transparent and thin as the petals of a flower.

Cassandra told Giovanni of the wonders she had seen: of the desolate grandeur of marble temples standing on sea-worn cliffs, at their feet the blue Ionian waves, their columns bedewed with the brine, like the naked body of the foam-born goddess long ago. She told of her incredible exertions, dangers, accidents. He asked her what she had sought, why she had collected these things at the cost of so much toil, and she answered in the words of Luigi her father:

"To bring the dead to life."

And her eyes glowed with the fire that had belonged to Cassandra, the witch of days gone by.

In appearance she was little changed; she had the same face, untouched by grief or joy—impassive as the faces of the ancient statues; the same broad low forehead, straight fine eyebrows, firm unsmiling lips, and amber eyes. Yet now her face, refined by illness, or perhaps by the over-insistence of a single thought, had taken an expression calmer and more austere than it had worn in her girlhood. Her dark hair, twined and wreathed like Medusa's snakes, still gave the impression of having a life of its own, still formed a frame for her pale face, and enhanced the brilliance of her eyes, the scarlet of her lips. The charm of the girl attracted Giovanni irresistibly as of old, and renewed in his soul the old feeling of curiosity, compassion, and fear.

In her journey across the land of Hellas she had visited her mother's native place, the lonely little

town of Mistra, near the ruins of Sparta, among the bare hills where, half a century before, had died Gemistus Pletho, last teacher of the Hellenic philosophy. Telling Giovanni of her visit to his grave, she repeated Pletho's prophecy that after a few years the world would return to a single faith, not differing from the ancient paganism.

"The prophecy is not fulfilled," said Giovanni, "though more than fifty years have passed. Have you still faith in him, Monna Cassandra?"

"There was not perfect truth in Pletho," she replied calmly, "for there was much he did not know."

"What?" asked Giovanni; and under the intentness of her glance he felt his heart sink.

She took a parchment from the shelf, and read to him certain lines from the *Prometheus*, in which the Titan, having enumerated his gifts to men, more especially that fire which he had stolen from heaven, and which would make them equal with the gods, goes on to prophesy the fall of Zeus.

"Giovanni, have you never heard of the man who, ten centuries ago, dreamed, like Pletho, of reviving the dead gods—the Emperor Flavius Claudius Julian?"

"Julian the Apostate?"

"Ay, so they called him. He gave his life in vain for the Olympians." She hesitated, then continued in a lower voice: "If I were to tell you all, Giovanni! But for to-day I will say only this. Among the Olympians is a god nearer

than all others to his brethren below; a god both bright and dark; fair as the dawn, yet pitiless as death; who came to earth and gave to mortals—as Prometheus had done—the forgetting of death and the boon of fire—new fire—in his own blood, in the intoxicating juice of the vine; and, my brother, who is there among men who will understand? who will go boldly forth and say to the world: 'The love of him who is crowned with the vine is like the love of Him who is crowned with thorns (who said, "I am the true vine"); of Him who, no less than Dionysus, makes the world drunk with his blood'? Have you understood, Giovanni, of whom I speak? If not, ask me nothing, for here is a secret which we may not, as yet, reveal."

Of late a great audacity of thought had come to Giovanni. He feared nothing, because he had nothing to lose. He had convinced himself that neither in the faith of Fra Benedetto, nor in the knowledge of Leonardo, would he find peace. Cassandra's prophecies gave him a glimpse of a new idea, so startling as to be terrible. Instead of turning away he approached it with the courage of despair. Day by day their souls came closer to each other.

Once he asked her why she hid what she believed to be the truth, why she even dissembled.

"All things are not for all men," she answered. "Martyrdoms, wonders, and signs are necessary for the crowd. Only those whose faith is imper-

fect die for their faith, that they may convince others, and themselves. But perfect faith is the same thing as perfect knowledge. Did the truths of geometry discovered by Pythagoras require that he should die in proof of them? Perfect faith is silent; and its secret is above profession, for the master said, 'Ye know all, but be ye known of none.'"

"What master?" asked Giovanni, thinking of Leonardo.

"Basil, the Egyptian Gnostic," she replied; and explained that the great teachers of the early Christian ages, to whom faith and knowledge had been one, had called themselves Gnostics or Knowers; and she went on to repeat to him many of their sayings, often strange and monstrous, like the visions of the delirious.

He was especially impressed by a legend as to the creation of the world and of man, put forth by the Alexandrine Ophites or snake worshippers.

"'Above all the heavens is boundless Darkness, immovable, fairer than any light; the Unknown Father, the Abyss, the Silence. His only-begotten daughter, the Wisdom of God, separating from the Father, knew life, and sorrow, and darkened her splendour. The son of her travail was Jaldavaoth, the creating God. Falling away from his mother he plunged yet more deeply into existence, and created the world of the body, a distorted image of the spiritual world. In it was Man, formed to reflect the greatness of his creator, and to bear

witness to his power. The elemental spirits, the ministers of Jaldavaoth, brought the senseless mass of flesh to Jaldavaoth to be endowed with life; but the Wisdom of God inspired it also with a breath of the divine wisdom, received by her from the Unknown Father. And then this mean creature, formed of earth and dust, became greater than Jaldavaoth its creator, and grew into the shape and the likeness not of him but of the true God, the Unknown Father. Four-footed Man raised his face from the earth, and Jaldavaoth, at the sight of the being which had slipped from his power, was filled with anger and alarm. He formed another creature, the Angel of Darkness, the serpent-like Satan, the wisdom accursed. And by the help of the serpent Jaldavaoth formed the three kingdoms of Nature; and set Man therein and gave him a law. "Do this; do not that: if thou breakest the law, thou shalt die." For he hoped by the yoke of the law, and by the fear of death to recover his power over Man. But the Wisdom of God still protected Man, and sent him a comforter, the Spirit of Knowledge—snake-like also, but winged like the morning star, the Angel of the Dawn, him to whom allusion is made in the saying, "Be ye wise as the serpent." And the Spirit of Knowledge went down to men and said, "Taste and know and your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods."'

"Hearken, Giovanni," concluded Cassandra; "the men of the crowd, the children of this world,

are the slaves of Jaldavaoth and of the serpent Satan, living under the fear of death, bound by the yoke of the law. But the children of light, those who *know*, the chosen of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, transcend all laws, overstep all bounds, are free as gods, are furnished with wings, remain pure in the midst of evil, even as gold glitters in the mire. And the Spirit of Knowledge, the Angel of the Dawn, leads them through life and death, through evil and through good, through all the curses and the terrors of the world of Jaldavaoth, to the great mother, Sophia, the Wisdom of God; and she bringeth them to the bosom of the great Darkness, which reigns above the heavens, which is immovable and fairer than any light; to the bosom of the Father of all things."

And hearing this legend of the Ophites, Giovanni could not help inwardly comparing Jaldavaoth to the son of Kronos; the breath of Divine Wisdom to the fire of Prometheus; the Beneficent Serpent, the Angel of the Dawn, Lucifer, Son of the Morning, to Prometheus the Titan. In all ages and nations, in the tragedies of Æschylus, in the legend of the Gnostics, in the history of Julian the Apostate, in the teaching of Pletho the philosopher, Giovanni found the echoes of the great discord, the same great struggle, which darkened his own spirit. Ten centuries ago men were suffering as he suffered now, were contending with the same double thoughts, were the victims of the same contradictions, the same temptations. The know-

ledge that this was so solaced him, yet it deepened his anguish. Sometimes he felt overwhelmed by all these thoughts as by drunkenness or delirium. And then it seemed to him that Cassandra only pretended to be strong and inspired and initiated into the mystery of truth, while in reality she was no less ignorant, no less astray than he was himself; and that the two of them were as helpless and lost as they had been twelve years before; and this new sabbath of half-divine, half-satanic lore was even more senseless than the Witches' Sabbath to which she had once invited him, and which she now despised as childishness. Giovanni became alarmed and wished to flee, but it was too late; curiosity drew him like a spell, and he felt he would not leave her till he knew all to the end; till he had found salvation and had perished with her.

Now about this time there came to Milan a famous inquisitor and doctor of theology, Fra Giorgio da Casale.

The Pope, Julius II., alarmed by the spread of sorcery in Lombardy, had sent him with bulls and powers of committal and of extraordinary punishments. Monna Cassandra stood in grave peril; and was warned both by the nuns of the Monastero Maggiore and by the archbishop. She and Messer Galeotto had already fled from Rome to escape this same Fra Giorgio; they knew that once fallen into his hands they would find no escape, and determined to take refuge in France, perhaps in England or even Scotland.

Pope Julius II. (Raphael, Florence).

Photo by Anderson.

Two days before their setting forth, Giovanni was with Cassandra in her lonely room of the Palazzo Carmagnole. The sunshine, veiled by the thick cypress branches, was scarce brighter than moonlight; the girl seemed even fairer and calmer than was her wont. Now that parting was at hand, Giovanni realised how dear she was to him.

"Shall I not see you yet once more?" he asked her. "Will you not reveal to me that mystery of which you have spoken?"

Cassandra looked fixedly at him; then drew from a casket a flat four-cornered stone of transparent green. It was the famous "Tabula Smaragdina," the emerald tablet said to have been found in a cave near Memphis in the hands of the mummy of a certain priest, who was an incarnation of Hermes Trismegistus, the Egyptian Horus, the god of boundaries, the guide of the dead to the underworld. It was engraved both in Coptic and in Greek with these verses:

"Οὐρανός ἄνω οὐρανός κάτω,
Ἀστέρα ἄνω ἀστέρα κάτω,
Πᾶν ἄνω πᾶν τοῦτο κάτω.
Ταῦτα λάβε καί εὐτύχε."

(Heaven above, heaven below;
Stars above, stars below;
All that is over, under shall show.
Happy thou who the riddle readest.)

"Come to me this night," she said gravely and softly, "and I will tell you all that I know myself—

do you hear?—all, to the very end. And now before we part, let us drink together the cup of friendship."

She fetched a small pottery vessel, sealed with wax as in the far East, poured out wine, thick as oil, golden-ruddy, and with a strange perfume, into an ancient goblet of chrysolite, with a relief of Dionysus and the Bacchantes. Going to the window she raised the cup as if about to pour a libation; the rosy wine, like warm blood, gave life to the figures of the naked Mænads on the transparent cup.

"There was a time, Giovanni," she said, "when I fancied that your Master Leonardo possessed the great secret, for his face is as that of an Olympian god, blended with a Titan. But now I see he aims, but he does not attain; seeks, and finds not; knows, but understands not. *He is the precursor of him who shall come after him, who is greater than he.* Let us drink together, O my brother, this farewell goblet to the Unknown whom we both invoke; to the supreme Reconciler."

Devoutly, as if performing a religious rite, she drank half the cup and handed it to Giovanni.

"Fear not!" she said; "this is no poisoned philtre; this wine is from grapes of Nazareth; 't is the purest blood of *Dionysus, the Galilæan!*"

When he had drunk, she laid her hands on his shoulders, and whispered rapidly and solemnly:

"If you would know all, come! Come, and I will tell you the secret, which never yet have I ut-

tered to any one. I will reveal the extreme joy, the extreme sorrow which shall unite us for ever, as brother and sister, as bridegroom and bride."

In the sun's rays, veiled by the thick cypresses, and pale as moonlight, just as once before by the Cantarana water in the whiteness of the summer lightning, she put her face close to his, her face white as marble, framed by its Medusa locks, with its scarlet lips, its amber eyes.

The chill of a familiar terror froze Giovanni's heart, and he said to himself:

"*La Diavolessa bianca!*"

That night at the appointed hour Giovanni stood at the door of the Palazzo Carmagnole. He knocked long, but none opened to him. At last he went to the Monastero Maggiore, and there he learned the terrible news. Fra Giorgio da Casale had appeared suddenly, and had given orders at once to apprehend Galeotto Sacrobosco and his niece Cassandra on a charge of black magic.

Messer Galeotto had succeeded in escaping, but Cassandra was already in the clutch of the Holy Inquisition.

II

Next day Boltraffio did not leave his bed. He was indisposed, and his head ached; he was half unconscious, and cared for nothing.

At nightfall there was an unwonted pealing of bells, and through his room spread a faint but re-

pulsive odour. His headache increased, he felt sick, and he went out into the air. The day was warm and damp, a day of *scirocco*, frequent at Milan in the early autumn. There was no rain, but the roofs and the trees dripped, and the brick pavement was shining and slippery. Yet in the open air Giovanni found the noisome odour still stronger than in his room.

The streets were thronged, the people all coming from the Piazza del Broletto; as Giovanni looked in their faces he fancied them in the same state of semi-unconsciousness as himself. Presently chance words from a passer-by explained to him the noisome odour which pursued him; it was the appalling stench of burned human bodies. They were burning witches, sorceresses. Perhaps—O God!—burning Cassandra!

He began to run, not knowing whither, jostling people, staggering like a drunken man, trembling with ague, feeling the foul savour in the greasy yellow mist, feeling it follow him, catch him by the throat, stifle his lungs, bind his temples with a dull and gnawing pain.

He never remembered how he made his way to the Monastery of San Francisco and to Fra Benedetto's cell. It was empty, for Benedetto was at Bergamo. Giovanni shut the door, lit a candle, and sank exhausted on the pallet-bed.

In this familiar and peaceful retreat all breathed of holiness and peace. The stench had dissipated, he smelt only incense, fast-day olives, old books,

and the varnish for Benedetto's simple paintings. On the wall hung a crucifix and an ancient gift of Giovanni's, a withered garland of flowers gathered on the heights of Fiesole in those days when he sat at the feet of Savonarola.

He raised his eyes to the Crucified. The Saviour still extended his nailed hand as if calling the world to his embrace: "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden." Was not that the one, the perfect truth?

But the prayer died on his lips. Not though eternal damnation threatened him could he cease to know what he did know, could he drive out or reconcile the two truths which were contending in him. In his old calm despair he turned away from the Crucified, and at the same moment he fancied that the noisome mist, the terrible stench of the burning, had reached him even here in this last refuge.

And there rose before him a vision which he had seen often of late, so distinct he scarce knew if it were reality or dream: the vision of Cassandra in the glow of the scarlet flame, among the instruments of torture and stains of blood; she white, virginal, firm as the marble of a statue, preserved by the power of the Beneficent Serpent, the Reconciler, the Deliverer, insensible to the iron and the flame and the gaze of her tormentors.

Coming to himself, he knew by the dying candle, by the strokes of the convent clock, that hours had passed in oblivion, and that it was now past mid-

night. It was very still, and the air was hot. Through the window were seen pale blue flashes of lightning, as on that memorable night long ago by the Cantarana. The dull roar of distant thunder seemed to come from below the earth. His head ached, his mouth was parched, thirst tortured him; he remembered having seen a pitcher of water in the corner. He rose, dragging himself along by the wall, found it, drank, and was returning to his couch when he became conscious that some one was with him in the cell. Seated on the couch was a figure in the long dark habit of a monk, a hood covering the face. He was astonished, for the door was locked, yet he felt relieved rather than alarmed. His head ceased to ache, his senses were quickened. He approached the seated figure. It rose, and the cowl fell back; Giovanni saw the face, marble white, passionless, the lips red as blood, the amber eyes, the halo of black hair like Medusa's snakes.

Solemnly, slowly, as if for an incantation, Cassandra rose, her arms extended. The black robe fell back. He saw the glowing warmth and beauty of her neck. Was she alive? My God! was she alive?

For the last time Giovanni murmured, "The white sorceress!" It seemed as if the veil of life were rent before him. He was face to face with the mystery of the supreme union. She knelt before him. . . . She folded him in her arms. . . . Ah! the inexpressible sweetness! the inexpressible fear! . . . Delirium! delirium!

III

Zoroastro da Peretola had not died, neither had he recovered from his fall. He was a cripple, and able to mutter only fragmentary words intelligible to none but the Master. Sometimes he roamed about the house, clattering on his crutches; sometimes he listened to conversation as if trying to understand it; or he would sit on a corner winding strips of linen, or planing wooden staves, whittling sticks, or carving tops, for his workman's hands had not lost their need of movement, nor entirely their skill. But often he would rock himself for hours together, a smile on his face, and his arms waving as if they were wings, while he crooned an unending ditty:

"Cucurlu! Curlu!
Cranes and eagles
Up they flew!
Up they flew,
Cranes and eagles,—
Cucurlu!"

And then, looking at the Master, he would weep —a sight too painful for Leonardo to bear. He never deserted the broken creature, but cared for him, gave him money, and whenever possible kept him in his house. Years passed, and the cripple remained a living reproof, a mockery of his life-long effort, his fashioning of wings for men.

Scarce less distressed was Leonardo by the at-

titude of Cesare da Sesto, that one of his pupils who was perhaps nearest to his heart. Like Astro and Giovanni he was mentally crippled, anxious to stand alone, but overwhelmed by the Master's influence, and reduced to nullity. Not content to be an imitator, not strong enough to be independent, he wore himself out with fruitless fretting and impotent rage, incompetent either to save himself or to perish. He was one of those upon whom Leonardo was accused of having cast the Evil Eye.

Cesare was said to be in secret correspondence with Raphael, who was working at the frescoes of the Vatican Stanze, and Leonardo sometimes thought treachery was meditated. But worse than the treachery of enemies was the so-called fidelity of friends. Under the name of the *Accademia di Leonardo*, a school of young painters had grown up in Milan, a few of them his pupils, the greater number newcomers, who clung to him like parasites, and persuaded themselves and others that they were following in his steps. He stood aloof, and watched them. At times disgust overwhelmed him when he saw how all that he had reverenced as great and sacred had become the property of the common herd; how the Lord's face in the *Cenacolo* was copied till it was mere ecclesiastical commonplace; how the smile of La Gioconda was imitated, exaggerated, vulgarised, till it became stupid, if not sensual.

One winter's night Leonardo was sitting alone, listening to the shriek and roar of the storm; it was

just such a night as that in which he had heard of Monna Lisa's death; he was thinking of her, and thinking of Death itself, of the last dread solitude in the bosom of ancient Chaos, of the infinite weariness of the world. There was a knock; he rose and opened the door. A young man entered, a lad of nineteen, with bright eyes, fresh cheeks reddened by the cold, melting snowflakes in his chestnut curls.

"Oh, Messer Leonardo!" he exclaimed, "do you not know me?"

Leonardo looked and recognised his little friend, the child with whom he had roamed the woods of Vaprio, Francesco Melzi. He embraced him with fatherly tenderness. The youth related how, after the French invasion of 1500, his father had taken his family to Bologna, and there had fallen sick of a malady which had lasted for long years. Now he was dead, and the son had hastened to Leonardo, remembering his promise.

"But what promise?" asked the painter, bewildered.

"Ah! you have forgotten! And I, poor simpleton, have been counting on it! Nay, then, do you not remember? You were carrying me in the mine at the foot of Monte Campione, and you told me how you were to serve Cæsar Borgia in Romagna. And I wept, and prayed you to take me with you, and you promised that after ten years' time, when I should be grown——"

"Ay! I recall it!" said Leonardo, warmly.

"You see? Ah, Messer Leonardo, I know you have no need of me. But I will be no burden to you, I will not disturb you. Pr'ythee, drive me not hence! If you drive me hence, I will not go! I will never leave you again!" cried the lad.

"My dear, dear boy!" said the Master, and his voice shook.

He embraced him again, and Francesco clung to his breast as he had done years ago when Leonardo had carried him into the subterranean darkness of the forgotten pit.

IV

Since Leonardo had left Florence in 1507, he had been enrolled as Court painter in the service of the French King, Louis XII. He had no fixed salary, but relied on the royal bounty. The treasurers frequently forgot him altogether, nor was he able to call opportune attention to himself by his productions, for as years increased upon him he worked less and less. He was consequently, as of old, in continual straits and entanglements; he borrowed wherever he could, and contracted new debts before he had paid off the old. He wrote the same timid, clumsy petitions to the French Viceroy and Treasurer as formerly to the officials of Ludovico Il Moro.

"Not wishing to fatigue Your Excellency's generosity, I permit myself to request that I may receive a regular salary. More than once have I

Francesco Melzi (Giovanni Boltraffio, Milan).

Photo by Anderson.

addressed Your Lordship on this subject, but hitherto have been vouchsafed no reply."

In the ante-chambers of his patrons he quietly waited his turn among other suppliants, though with advancing years he increasingly knew—

> "How salt another's bread is, and the toil
> Of going up and down another's stairs."

The service of princes was as bitter to him as had been the service of the republic; everywhere and always he felt himself a stranger. Raphael had become rich and splendid as a Roman patrician; Michelangelo was hoarding money against the evil days; Leonardo was still a homeless wanderer, not knowing where he could lay his head when he came to die.

War's victories, the defeat of his friends, changes in governments and laws, the enslaving of peoples, the chasing forth of tyrants—all that to the generality seems important, was to him as a whirl of dust to a wayfarer on a highroad. With equal indifference he fortified the Castle of Milan for the French King against the Lombards, as once he had fortified it for the Duke of Lombardy against the French.

Trivulzio, the ambitious general, was intriguing against Massimiliano, and Leonardo saw the fate of the father, Il Moro, threatening Il Moretto. Wearied by these monotonous and arbitrary political changes, sickened by the manufacture of triumphal arches and the mending of the wings of

the trumpery angels, he determined to leave Milan and pass into the service of the Medici.

In Rome, however—for Giovanni de' Medici, having become Pope, with the style of Leo X., had nominated his brother Giuliano as Gonfaloniere of the Holy Church. He had already gone to Rome, and it was arranged that Leonardo should join him in the autumn. He was to be both painter and "alchemist" in Giuliano's service.

*

On the morrow of the day when the hundred and thirty-nine witches had been burned in the Piazza del Broletto, the monks of San Francesco had found Giovanni Boltraffio stretched senseless on the floor of Fra Benedetto's cell. Clearly he was suffering, as he had suffered fifteen years earlier, after having heard the tale of Savonarola's martyrdom. On this second occasion his recovery was rapid; nevertheless there were times when his unspeculative eye, his strangely impassive face, inspired Leonardo with greater fear than during his long illness of years ago.

However that might be, on the 23d of September, 1513, Leonardo rode out of Milan for Rome to join his new patron Giuliano, with Francesco Melzi, Salaino, Cesare, Astro, and Giovanni.

BOOK XVI

LEONARDO, MICHELANGELO, AND RAPHAEL—1513–1515

La pazienza fa contra alle ingiurie non altrimenti che si faccino i panni contra del freddo; imperò che, se ti multiplicherai di panni secondo la multiplicazione del freddo, esso freddo nocere non ti potrà; similmente alle grandi ingiurie cresci la pazienza, essa ingiurie offendere non ti potranno la tua mente.—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

(Patience acts against insults as garments act against cold. With the doubling of your misfortunes, put on a double cloak of endurance.)

I

POPE LEO X., true to the traditions of the House of the Medici, posed as patron of art and learning. When he heard of his own election he said to his brother:

"Let us *enjoy* the papal power, since God has conceded it to us!"

And Fra Mariano, his favourite jester added:

"Seek your own pleasure, Holy Father! All else is folly."

The Pope surrounded himself with poets, musicians, painters, and scholars. A golden age had dawned for imitative men of letters, who had

one unassailable article of faith, the perfection of Cicero's prose and of Virgil's poetry.

The shepherds of Christ's flock avoided the mention of His name, because it was a word unknown to Cicero's *Orations*. They called nuns, vestals; the Holy Ghost, the Inspiration of the Supreme Jove; and they requested the Pope to include Plato in the roll of saints. Bembo, a future Cardinal, owned that he did not read the Epistles of Paul (he called them *Epistolaccie*) lest he should spoil his style. When Francis I. asked for the Laocoön Leo X. replied that he would sooner give him the head of Peter the Apostle.

The Pope loved his scholars and artists, his poets and pedants; but above all he loved his jesters. He solemnly crowned Cuerno, the celebrated rhymester and drunkard, and was no less liberal to him than to Raphael. He spent huge sums on feasts, though he ate sparingly himself, being afflicted with a weak digestion, and an incurable purulent disease; and his soul was no less sick than his body, for he suffered from continual *ennui*.

When Leonardo first presented himself at the Vatican he was told that his only hope of obtaining audience of His Holiness was to declare himself a buffoon. He did not follow this good advice, and failed of admission time and again. Of late he had experienced strange forebodings which he tried to put from him as senseless and absurd. It was not anxiety as to his affairs which oppressed him: nor

was it his failure to gain adequate recognition from Leo X. or Giuliano de' Medici. He had been too long used to annoyances of this kind. But his vague disquiet, his ominous apprehension, continually increased; till one radiant autumn evening as he was returning from the Vatican, his heart sank, under the pressure of imminent catastrophe.

He was living in the same house where he had lived during his former visit to Rome; one of the small detached buildings behind St. Peter's, which had belonged to the Papal Mint. It was old and gloomy, and having been unoccupied for several years was exceedingly damp. He entered a large vaulted apartment with cracks on walls and ceiling, and windows overshadowed by the wall of the adjoining house.

In the corner sat Astro the imbecile, his feet drawn up under him, his hands busy whittling sticks, while he purred his monotonous lullaby:

"Cucurlu, curlu!
Eagles and cranes
Up they flew!"

Leonardo's anxiety perceptibly increased.

"What 's the matter, Astro?" he asked kindly, laying his hand on the cripple's head.

"Nothing," said Astro, with a curious look of intelligence, "nothing with me. It 's Giovanni. But it 's all the better for him. He has flown away."

"Giovanni? Where is Giovanni?" cried Leo-

nardo, suddenly realising that his forebodings had centred on this unhappy disciple. "Astro! I implore you, my friend, try to remember! Where is Giovanni? I must see him at once. Where is he? What has happened?"

"Don't you understand?" muttered Astro, vainly seeking for the right words. "He is up there—he has escaped—flown away. You don't understand? I will show you then. It is better for him to have flown away."

He rolled himself to his feet and shuffled along on his crutches, leading his master up the creaking stair to the attic, where the sun burned hot on the tiled roof, and the sunset rays shone upon the dormer-window. As they entered, startled pigeons fluttered their wings noisily and flew away.

"There he is," said Astro, simply, and pointed to a dark corner. Leonardo saw the figure of Giovanni, apparently standing, very erect and quite motionless, his widely opened eyes staring fixedly straight before him. "Giovanni!" cried Leonardo, with shaking voice, a cold sweat bursting out on his forehead.

He drew nearer; saw that the face was strangely distorted, touched the nerveless hand, and felt it cold. The body oscillated heavily to and fro. Giovanni had hanged himself from an iron hook lately inserted for mechanical purposes into the cross-beam; and by means of a strong silken cord, one of the attachments of the flying machine.

Astro had fallen back into his torpor, and was

looking serenely out of the window. The house stood high, and commanded a view of the tiled roofs, the domes and towers of Rome, of the Campagna spreading like a sea, traversed by long lines of ruined aqueducts, of the hills of Albano and Frascati, of the clear sky where the swallows swooped and circled. Astro watched them, and smiled, and waved his arms joyously as if imitating their flight.

"Cucurlu!
Up they flew!
Curlu!"

he crooned contentedly.

Leonardo stood, still as a stone, between his two disciples, the imbecile and the suicide.

*

A few days later he found Giovanni's diary and read it attentively.

"'The white witch!' always and everywhere! May she be accursed. The last mystery: two shall be in one. Christ and Antichrist are one. The heaven above—the heaven below!

"No! No! This shall not, must not be! Rather, death!

"Into thy hands I commit my spirit, O God! Be thou my Judge!"

There came an abrupt end to the entries. Leonardo understood that these words had been penned on the day of the writer's suicide.

II

After the death of Giovanni, Leonardo wearied of his life in Rome. Uncertainty, waiting, forced inaction, enervated him. His usual occupations, his books, machines, experiments, paintings, failed in interest.

Leo X. had not yet found time to receive him, nor to give him the order for a painting. However, he set the artist to the mechanical task of perfecting the coining mill for the Papal Mint. Leonardo despised no work, however humble; he did what was required, and devised new machinery, by means of which the coins, uneven and jagged before, were cut perfectly true. The artist was at this time overwhelmed with debts, and the greater part of his salary went in the payment of the interest on his borrowings. But for the generosity of Francesco Melzi, who had inherited property from his father, he would have been in extreme want.

In the summer of 1514 he was attacked by the malaria. It was his first serious illness. He refused doctors and medicines, but allowed Francesco to wait upon him. Every day he became more attached to this lad, and felt that God had sent him a guardian angel, a prop for his old age. Men seemed to be forgetting him, but from time to time he made attempts to remind them of his existence. From his sick-bed he wrote to Giuliano de' Medici, striving after the fashionable compliments

which did not come easily to his lips or pen.

III

After much rain the end of November brought sunny days, never so beautiful as in Rome, where the decaying splendour of autumn harmonises well with the ruined glories of the Eternal City.

One morning Leonardo went with Francesco to see the Sistine Chapel and the frescoes of Michelangelo; a visit long purposed, but deferred as if from a secret sense of fear.

The chapel is a long, narrow, very lofty building, with plain walls and Gothic windows. Buonarotti had covered the ceiling and arches with biblical scenes. Leonardo looked, and staggered, as if faint; whatever his secret expectation, he had never thought to behold such potency of art.

In face of the colossal figures, sublime as the visions of delirium—the God of Sabaoth dividing light from darkness in the bosom of Chaos, blessing the waters and plants, creating Adam from the earth, and Eve from Adam's rib—in face of the representations of the Fall, the Redemption, and all the incidents of Scripture history; in face of the beautiful nude youths, spirits of the elements accompanying the tragedy of the Universe, the conflict of God and Man, with eternal dancing and song; prophets and sibyls, terrible giants that seemed weighed down with more than human wis-

dom and with more than human woe; the ancestors of the Messiah, a long file of obscure patriarchs passing on from one to the other the purposeless burden of life, awaiting in darkness the coming of the unknown Redeemer;—in face of these stupendous creations of his rival Leonardo did not measure, nor compare, nor judge; he felt himself and his work annihilated.

He enumerated his own productions: the *Cenacolo*, which was perishing, the *Colossus*, which had been destroyed, the *Battle of Anghiari*, and an endless number of other unfinished paintings; a succession of vain endeavours, ridiculous failures, inglorious defeats. He had spent his life in beginning, intending, making ready; he had achieved nothing. Why deceive himself? It was too late now; he would never accomplish anything. His life had been expended in incredible labour; yet now at its close he felt like the slothful servant in the parable who had buried his talent in the earth.

Yet he was conscious that he had aimed at something higher than this other man; to Michelangelo all was turmoil, chaos; Leonardo had seen, and had tried to show, the eternal harmony. He remembered Monna Lisa's parable of the mighty wind, and of the still small voice where the Lord was; he felt that she had discerned a truth, that sooner or later the human mind would return to the path he had shown, the path from discord to harmony, from division to unity, from storm to quietness. The consciousness of how entirely right

Frescoes by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, Rome.

Photo by Anderson.

he had been in theory made still more painful to him the consciousness of impotence in action.

They left the chapel in silence. Francesco ventured no questions; but he fancied that the Master had suddenly aged, had become feeble and broken. Years had apparently passed since they had entered the chapel.

Crossing the Piazza of St. Peter's, they went by the Borgo Nuovo towards the bridge of St. Angelo. Leonardo was thinking of another rival whom he had perhaps no less reason to fear, Raphael Sanzio. He had seen the young painter's newly finished frescoes in the Stanze of the Vatican, and had felt unable to decide whether the greatness of the execution were not equalled by the poverty of the conception, the perfection of eye and hand by the servile flattery of the princes of this world. Julius II. had dreamed of expelling the French from Italy; therefore Raphael had shown him watching the expulsion of Heliogabalus from the profaned temple of the most high God. Leo X. posed as a great orator; therefore Raphael celebrated him in the person of Leo the Great warning Attila to retreat from Rome. He had been taken prisoner by the French and had escaped; Raphael represented this by the miraculous deliverance of St. Peter. Thus he degraded his art into the nauseous incense of a courtier's flattery.

This stranger from Urbino, this dreamy youth with the face of a sinless angel, had managed his mundane affairs to the best advantage. He

painted the stables of Chigi the banker; made designs for the table service of gold which, after the entertaining of the Holy Father, the banker threw into the Tiber, that it might never be used by any one less illustrious. The "fortunate boy," as Francia called the young painter, acquired fame and wealth as if by play. He disarmed his worst enemies by kindliness; he was what he appeared to be, the friend of all. In everything he succeeded. The gifts of Fortune dropped unsought into his hands. He replaced Bramante on the architectural conclave for the building of the new cathedral; Cardinal Bibbiena offered him his niece in marriage; it was said he had been promised a cardinal's hat. He built a dainty mansion in the Borgo, and furnished it with regal splendour. His ante-chamber was crowded with official personages, and with envoys from abroad who either wanted their portraits painted, or desired to take home some specimen of the great man's art. He was overwhelmed with patrons and refused new ones. They insisted. Time was wanting to execute his innumerable orders, and many of his pictures were chiefly painted by his pupils. His studio became a factory where such skilful workmen as Giulio Romano turned canvas and paint into ready money with amazing facility. He himself apparently desisted from the search after perfection, and was content with popularity. He served the people, and they accepted him enthusiastically as their chosen, their beloved, bone of their bone,

flesh of their flesh, the incarnation of their own spirit.

The worst of it was, that in his fall he was still great; a seduction not only to the vulgar herd, but also to the elect. He seemed unspoiled by the glittering baubles showered on him by Fortune. He remained innocent and pure. The *fortunato garzone* had no consciousness of the danger for himself and for art. For in this superficial harmony, in this pseudo-reconciliation of discordant elements, there was greater danger for the future than in the chaos and contradictions and wars introduced by Michelangelo. Leonardo could see nothing beyond the work of these two painters; after them, all seemed abysmal and void. He felt how much both owed to himself. From him they had had their science of light and shade, their anatomy, their perspective, their knowledge of Nature and of man. Yes, they had grown out of him; and now the two of them, they had destroyed him! Leonardo walked silently beside his young companion, his eyes downcast, his head bent, his face intensely sorrowful and *old:* he seemed in a trance.

As they approached the bridge, they had to draw aside to give room to a cavalcade—some great man, a cardinal, perhaps, or an ambassador, escorted by sixteen horsemen richly attired. The personage proved a young man, sumptuously clad, riding a grey Arab with gilded and jewelled trappings. His face seemed familiar; and suddenly Leonardo remembered the pale shy youth in the

girlish frock, daubed with paint and worn into holes at the elbow, who eight years before had said, "Michelangelo is not worthy to tie the latchet of your shoe!"

Now this boy was the rival both of Leonardo and Michelangelo, and was called the "God of Painting"!

His face, though still boyish, innocent, and unseared by emotion, was somewhat less of a seraph's. He was a man of the great world now; riding from his villa in the Borgo to an interview with the Pope, he was accompanied by a troop of pupils, admirers, and friends. Indeed he never went out with an escort of less than fifteen. His every ride seemed a triumphal procession.

He recognised Leonardo; flushed slightly, and with quick, even exaggerated respect, doffed his cap and bowed. His younger pupils looked wonderingly at the old man to whom the "Divine One" showed so much respect; the quiet shabby old man, hugging the wall to let the cavalcade dash by.

Leonardo's attention was caught by the man riding at Raphael's side, apparently the most favoured of his pupils. It was Cesare da Sesto. Leonardo gazed in amazement, scarce able to believe his eyes. Now he understood Cesare's long absence, Francesco's clumsy explanation. The last of his disciples, he whom he had trusted to follow in his footsteps and carry on his method, had deserted and betrayed him. Cesare braved his gaze without flinching; nay, it was Leonardo

Raphael Sanzio (by himself, Florence).

Photo by Alinari.

whose eyes fell in confusion, as if guilty before the other of some unintended crime.

The cavalcade passed on, and the old man, leaning upon Francesco, went his way. They crossed Hadrian's bridge, and went by the Via dei Coronari to the Piazza Navona, where was the bird fair. Leonardo bought magpies, finches, thrushes, pigeons, a falcon, and a young wild swan. He spent all the money he had with him, and borrowed also of Francesco. Slung from head to foot with cages, the quaint pair attracted general attention. The passers-by stared curiously, the little boys ran after them. They walked past the Pantheon and Trajan's Forum, crossed the Esquiline, and left the town by the Porta Maggiore, following the ancient Roman road called the Via Labicana. Presently they turned into a narrow footpath leading into the solitude of the wild country.

Before them spread the boundless, the silent, the monotonous Campagna; through the arches of the Claudian Aqueduct, low hills were seen, uniform grey-green, like sea waves in the light of evening; here and there was a solitary tower, the deserted nest of robber knights; misty blue mountains surrounded the great plain, like the tiers of a colossal amphitheatre.

Over the city brooded the great peace of autumn twilight. The last rays of the sun, streaming from between heavy clouds, lay across the landscape in broad zones of brilliance, and shone on a herd of white cattle, which scarce turned their heads at the

sound of footsteps. The chirp of the grasshopper, the rustle of the breeze in the stalks of the withered summer flowers, the dull sound of the distant bells, but enforced the stillness; it seemed that here in this immense plain, so desolate, so solemn, had already been fulfilled the prophecy of the angel who swore, by him that liveth for ever and ever, there should be time no longer. They chose a convenient hillock, and relieved themselves of the cages; then Leonardo set the birds free.

As they flew away, with the joyous flutter and rustle of their wings, he followed them with loving eyes. He smiled, he forgot his griefs, and was happy as in his childhood. Only the falcon and the swan were still in their cages; their emancipation was reserved for a later hour.

Now he and Francesco ate a frugal supper of bread, chestnuts, dried cherries, cheese, a flask of the golden Orvieto wine. They were still silent. Francesco glanced at his master from time to time. Leonardo's hair was silvered and thin, his forehead lined, his deep-set eyes were still luminous and thoughtful, but weary. Age had set its effacing finger on the beauty of every feature. It was the face of an enfeebled, patient Titan.

Francesco pitied him, as he pitied all persons who were lonely and sorrowful. The Master, whom of all men he admired and loved, whom he set above the Michelangelo and the Raphael of the people's applause, was but a lonely and poor and despised old man, sitting on the grass among empty

bird-cages, cutting his cheese with an old broken clasp-knife, chewing his bread with an effort because his jaws were weakened by age, his appetite lost by recent illness. A lump rose in Francesco's throat, and he would gladly have knelt and assured his friend of his devotion, but he did not do so—he lacked the courage. At all times, even to those who loved him the best, Leonardo showed something alien and unapproachable.

The modest supper ended, Leonardo rose, let loose the hawk, then opened the last and largest cage, that one containing the wild swan. The great white bird came out noisily, stood dazzled for a minute flapping its wings, then flew straight towards the sun. Leonardo watched it with eyes full of unspoken grief. It was grief for the idle dream of his whole life, for the human wings, for the "Great Bird" of which he had written in his diary: "Man shall fly like a mighty swan."

IV

At last the Pope, yielding to the persuasions of his brother Giuliano, ordered a small picture from Leonardo. As usual he hesitated, put off beginning from day to day, spent his time in preliminary attempts, in perfecting his paints, in the invention of a new varnish.

His Holiness exclaimed in mock despair:

"Alack! this dull fellow will never perform anything; he studies the end before he has mastered the beginning."

The saying was repeated by the courtiers, and all over the town, and it sealed the fate of the painter. Leo, the supreme judge in matters of art, had pronounced sentence. Henceforth Raphael, Buonarotti, Bembo the pedant, and Baraballo the buffoon, need fear no rivalry; the Pope had jested, and the painter's reputation was crushed. The world forgot him, as it forgets the dead. When some one repeated Leo's witticism for his entertainment, he smiled indifferently, as if mockery were worse than he had expected. That night, however, he wrote in his diary:

"Patience is to the injured what clothes are to the frozen. With keener cold, augment your clothing and it shall not hurt you; with the increase of humiliation, double your cloak of patience."

*

Louis XII., King of France, died in 1515. Having no son, his crown passed to his nearest relative, Francis of Valois, Duke of Angoulême, who assumed the title of Francis I.

The young King at once took the field for the conquest of Lombardy. He crossed the Alps, appeared suddenly in Italy, gained a victory at Marignano, deposed Il Moretto, and entered Milan in triumph. About the same time Giuliano de' Medici left Rome for Savoy, and Leonardo, out of favour with the Pope, determined to try his fortune with the new sovereign. In the autumn he went to Pavia to the Court of Francis. Here the con-

Francis I. of France (Milan).

Photo by Anderson.

quered were celebrating the conquest and the glory of the conqueror, and Leonardo was at once invited to arrange the festival, his reputation as mechanician in the time of Il Moro being remembered. He agreed; and amongst other things constructed a lion which ran automatically across the hall, stood rampant before the King, and opened his breast, from which fell a shower of the white *fleurs-de-lys*. This toy made Leonardo more famous than all his great works, inventions, and discoveries. Francis was anxious to see Italian scholars and artists at his Court, but the Pope refused to spare either Michelangelo or Raphael, so Leonardo was offered a salary of seven hundred crowns and the little château of Cloux, in Touraine, near the town of Amboise, between Tours and Blois.

The artist accepted the offer; and in the sixty-fourth year of his life began once more his endless wandering; left his country without hope of return, and settled in the foreign land. He was accompanied by Francesco Melzi, Zoroastro, and his old servants, Battista de Villanis and the fat cook Maturina.

V

The road, especially in winter, was difficult; it led through the passes of Piedmont and Mont Cenis. Early, while it was still dark, they left Bardonecchia, so as to cross the Alps before night-

fall. The mules clattered their hoofs and jangled their bells as they clambered along a narrow path skirting the ravine. Spring had descended upon the southern valleys, but up here winter reigned supreme. The morning was just breaking; against the faintly tinted sky the Alps shone as if lighted by internal fire. Leonardo, wishing to see more of the mountains, left his beast, and with Francesco followed a steeper path at a little distance from the mule track. Perfect stillness surrounded them, only interrupted by the distant long-drawn roar of an avalanche. They scrambled higher, Leonardo leaning on the young man's arm. Francesco remembered the descent of the iron mine when the Master had carried him, now it was he who supported the Master.

"Oh, Messer Leonardo!" he cried suddenly, pointing to the ravine below, "look at the valley of the Dora! We see it for the last time! We are almost at the summit, and we shall not see it again! Yon lies all Lombardy! Italy!" he cried, his eyes wet with conflicting emotions; and he repeated, "Lombardy! Italy! For the last time!"

The Master's face remained unmoved. He looked, then turned silently and pressed onward towards the snows. Forgetting his weariness, he now walked so quickly that Francesco, who had lingered bidding farewell, was left behind.

"Nay, Master, whither go you?" he cried. "There is no path there; you can ascend no higher. I pray you take heed!"

But Leonardo went on, higher and higher, his step firm and light, as if his feet were winged.

Against the pale sky the icy masses towered one above the other; a stupendous wall raised by God between two worlds. They beckoned to Leonardo and drew him up and onwards. It seemed as if behind them rose the last secret,—which alone could satisfy his soul. Divided from him by impassable gulfs, they appeared near, almost within touch. They looked at him as the dead look at the living; they smiled at him with the smile of Monna Lisa.

His pale face lighted with the same glow that was shining upon the mountains and the ice. To him the thoughts of death and of Monna Lisa were now but one.

BOOK XVII

DEATH—THE WINGED PRECURSOR—1516–1519

"Φέρεις πτέρυγας ὡς ἰσωθεὶς ἀγγέλοις."
Inscription on the figure of St. John the Baptist.
(Thou hast wings, like unto the angels.)
"Spunteranno le ali."—LEONARDO DA VINCI.
(There shall be wings.)

I

IN the heart of France, overhanging the Loire, stood the royal castle of Amboise. It was built of stone, mellow in colour as the bloom on a golden plum, which in the pale blues and greens of the fading sunset gleamed soft as a floating cloud. From the square tower the view extended over a forest of primeval oak, beyond the broad meadows flanking the river. In the early summer they were brilliant with poppies invading the azure lines of the flax. Damp mists hung over the valley, dark poplars and silvery willows stood in long rows. It resembled the plain of Lombardy: only the rivers were unlike each other—the Adda, a torrent, passionate, storm-

tossed, young; the Loire, quiet and slow, gliding gently over shallows, wearied and very old.

At the foot of the castle clustered the peaked roofs of the town, slated, black, smooth, and shining in the sun, and among them massive brick chimneys. The streets, narrow, winding, and sunless, belonged to the Middle Ages. Everywhere, under all cornices and along all water-pipes, at the angles of the windows, door-frames, lintels, were small stone figures—jolly friars with flagons, rosaries, and wooden sandals, grave doctors of theology, thrifty citizens with fat purses hugged to their breasts. The same types were to be seen to-day walking the city streets; all here was *bourgeois*, prosperous, conventional, pious, and cold.

When the King came to Amboise for the hunting, the little town changed its aspect. The streets grew noisy with the baying of dogs, the champing of horses, the blare of trumpets. Music resounded lightly from the palace, and its walls shone red with the flaring of torches. The King gone, silence descended again upon the streets, the place was like an abode of the dead; no human step nor voice, save at mass-time on Sundays, and in the spring evenings when the children sang the old song of St. Denis under apple-trees which showered rosy petals on their heads. Night fell, the song was hushed, the children went away, and again there was silence; such silence as made audible the measured beat of the clock over the gate of the Horloge

Tower, and the cry of the wild swans far away on the sand-banks of the Loire.

Half a league from the castle, on the road to the Mill of St. Thomas, was a small château called Cloux, once the residence of the royal armourer. It was surrounded partly by a high wall, partly by a stream; in front of the house was a meadow, and a tangle of willows, alders, and hazel bushes descending to the river. The pink walls of the château were sharply defined against a background of chestnuts and elms; the windows and doors ornamented by a dog-tooth moulding in yellow Touraine stone. It was a small building with a high-pitched slatted roof; a tiny chapel on the right of the main entrance, and an octagonal tower, in which was a winding-stair, made it resemble a villa. Rebuilt forty years earlier, the outside was still new, cheerful, and inviting.

This little château Francis I. assigned as lodging to Leonardo da Vinci.

II

The King received the artist with cordiality, and talked long with him of his works, past and future, respectfully saluting him as "father" and "teacher."

Leonardo proposed to remodel the castle of Amboise, also to construct an immense canal, which, converting the barren marshes into a luxuriant garden, should connect the Loire and the Saône at Macon, and thus open a new route from

Northern Europe to the Mediterranean. In this wise he thought to benefit a foreign country by those gifts of knowledge which his fatherland had contemned. The King was pleased by the project, and at once Leonardo set out to explore the locality, studying the soil of the Sologne near Romorantin, the tributaries of the Loire and the Cher, the level of the waters, the topography of the whole district.

One day he visited Loches, a small town to the south of Amboise, where was the castle in which Ludovico Il Moro, Duke of Lombardy, had been incarcerated for eight years. The old warden told Leonardo how Il Moro had once made his escape, by hiding in a cart loaded with straw; not knowing the roads, however, he had lost his way in the forest, and next day had been easily recaptured. His last years had been spent in pious meditation, in prayer, and in the study of Dante's *Commedia*, the only book he had been allowed to bring out of Italy. At fifty he was a feeble wrinkled old man; only at rare intervals did his eyes flash, when rumours reached him of grave political changes. He died in May, 1508, after a short illness.

The warden told further how Ludovico had, a few months before his death, devised a pastime for himself; had begged for brushes and paints and had decorated the walls and arches of his prison. Leonardo found traces of his work on the damp and mouldy plaster; involved patterns, stripes and bars; stars and crosses; red on a white, yellow on a blue

ground; in the middle, the helmeted head of a warrior, probably himself, thus inscribed in broken French, "*Je porte en prison pour ma devise que je m'arme de pacience par force de peines que l'on me fait porter.*"

Another sentence ran all round the ceiling; it began with huge letters: "*Celui qui,*" then, space failing, continued in characters small and cramped, "*net pas contan.*" Reading these piteous inscriptions and looking at the clumsy drawings, Leonardo remembered how Il Moro had smiled admiringly on the swans on the moat of the fortress at Milan. "Perhaps," thought he, "the love of beauty which is certainly in his soul will justify him before the tribunal of the Most High."

Meditating on the fall of the hapless Duke, he remembered also what he had been told of the fate of another of his patrons, Cæsar Borgia. Julius II. had treacherously handed Cæsar over to his enemies, who had carried him to Spain and confined him in the tower of Medina del Campo. Daring and ingenious, he escaped by means of a rope let down from his prison window. The jailers had time to sever the rope; he fell and was seriously hurt, but none the less crawled to the horse provided by an accomplice, and rode away. He went to Pampeluna to the Court of his brother-in-law, the King of Navarre, where he took service as a condottiere.

Consternation spread through Italy; the Pope trembled; and ten thousand ducats were set upon

the head of the fugitive. On a wintry night of 1507 in an encounter with the French mercenaries under Beaumont, Cæsar was deserted by his followers, and driven into the dry bed of a river, where, like an animal at bay, he defended himself with desperate courage. At last he fell, pierced by twenty wounds. The mercenaries tore the splendid trappings from the dead warrior, and left him naked where he had fallen. Later, when the Navarrese came to seek him they knew him not, only Juanito, his little page, recognised his lord by reason of his great love for him; and flinging himself on the corpse he embraced it sobbing. Beautiful was the dead face, upturned to the heavens; and it seemed he had died even as he had lived, fearless, and without knowledge of remorse. Madonna Lucrezia, Duchess of Ferrara, wept ever for her brother; and when she died they found a hair shirt chafing her tender body. And Cæsar's youthful widow, Charlotte d'Albret, who in the few days she had been with him had come to love him as a very Griselda, having learned of his death, retired to perpetual seclusion in the castle of La Motte Feuillée, buried in the heart of a forest, where only winds rustled the dry leaves; nor used to leave her chamber, hung with perpetual mourning, save to distribute alms, imploring pensioners to pray for the soul of Cæsar.

And likewise the Duke's subjects in Romagna, husbandmen and half-savage shepherds from the valleys of the Apennine, kept most grateful mem-

ory of him. Long they refused to believe him dead, but waited for him as a god, who should some day return and establish justice in the land, cast down the tyrants, and defend the poor. Beggars who wandered from village to village chanted "the woeful lament for the Duca Valentino," in which was the line:

"Fe' cose estreme, ma senza misura."

Thus Leonardo mused on these two men, Ludovico and Cesare, whose lives had been signalled by great events, yet had passed away like shadows, leaving no trace. And he felt, after all, that his own life, spent in lofty contemplation, had been at least as fruitful.

Thus thinking, he ceased to murmur at the untowardness of Fate.

III

Like the majority of Leonardo's projects, the making of the Sologne canal ended in nothing. Timorous counsellors persuaded Francis of the impracticability of the enterprise. His Majesty grew cold, was disenchanted, and soon forgot all about it; Leonardo found that the King of France was no more to be relied upon than Il Moro, Soderini, or Leo X. He resolved to abandon all hope of enriching mankind by the treasures of his knowledge, and to retire for the rest of his life into solitude.

In the spring of 1517 he returned to Cloux, sick

of fever contracted in the marshes of the Sologne. He recovered partially, and by the summer season had strength sufficient to leave his room, and leaning on Francesco's arm to walk daily as far as to the woods. Here he would sit in the shadows of the trees, his pupil at his feet. Sometimes Francesco read to him; sometimes he was content merely to enjoy the sights and sounds of peaceful nature, gazing at the sky, the leaves, the stones, the grasses, the golden moss on the huge tree-trunks, as if bidding them all a last farewell. A sorrowful presentiment, a great pity for the Master, oppressed Francesco's heart. Silently he would touch Leonardo's hand with his lips; and then feel that trembling hand laid upon his head in a mournful caress, which deepened his sense of a coming doom.

At this time the Master began a strange picture.

Sheltered by overhanging rocks, in a cool shadow among flowering grasses, sat a god; he was long-haired and fair as a woman, but languid and pale; his head crowned with vine-leaves, a spotted skin round his loins, a thyrsus in his hand. He sat with legs crossed and seemed to be listening, a hinting smile on his lips, his finger pointed in the direction whence came the sound, perhaps the song of Mænads, perhaps the voice of great Pan, that thrilling sound from which all living things must flee.

In Boltraffio's casket Leonardo had found an amethyst gem, doubtless a gift from Monna Cassandra, with an engraving of Dionysus. There

were also stray leaves from Euripides' tragedy, the *Bacchæ*, translated from the Greek and copied out by Giovanni. Many times had Leonardo read these fragments; amongst them the address of Pentheus to the unknown god.

"Ha! of thy form thou art not ill-favoured, stranger,
For woman's tempting!
No wrestler thou, as show thy flowing locks
Down thy cheek floating, fraught with all desire;
And white from heedful tendance is thy skin,
Smit by no sunshafts, but made wan by shade,
While thou dost hunt desire with beauty's lure."

And the chorus of Bacchantes, answering the impious king, extol Dionysus as "the most terrible, the most beneficent of gods, who giveth to mortals the drunkenness of ecstasy."

On the same page, side by side with the verses from Euripides, Giovanni had copied verses from the Bible.

Leaving his *Bacchus* unfinished, Leonardo began another picture, still more strange, of St. John the Baptist. He worked at it more continuously and more rapidly than was his wont, as if feeling that his days were numbered, that his strength was every day declining, and that now or never he must give expression to that mystery which all his life he had hidden from men,—even from himself.

Soon the picture was sufficiently advanced for the conception to be clear. The background was dark, recalling the gloom of that cavern that he had

Bacchus (Leonardo da Vinci, Paris).

Photo by Alinari.

once described to Monna Lisa as the occasion both of curiosity and of fear. Yet the dimness was not impenetrable, but blent with light, melting into it as smoke dissolves into sunlight, as distant music vibrates away into silence. And between the darkness and the perfect light appeared what at first seemed a phantom, but presently showed more distinct than life itself; the face and figure of a naked youth, womanish, seductively beautiful, recalling the words of Pentheus.

But instead of the leopard's skin he wore a garment of camel's hair; instead of the thyrsus he carried a cross. Smiling, with bent head, as if listening, all expectation, all curiosity, yet half afraid, he pointed with one hand to the cross, with the other to himself; and on his lips the words seemed to tremble:

"There cometh one after me whose shoe's-latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

IV

After a tedious morning spent in touching for the king's evil, Francis I. felt a desire for something beautiful to divert his mind from the spectacle of deformity and sickness. He resolved to visit Leonardo's studio. Accordingly, with a few attendants, he presented himself at Cloux.

All day the painter had worked at his *Baptist*. His room was large and cold, with a brick floor and a high-raftered ceiling. The last slanting rays of

the sun streamed in through the narrow window; and Leonardo was hastening to finish his day's task before the coming on of twilight. When he heard voices and footsteps under the window, he said to Melzi:

"I admit no one. Say I am ill."

Francesco went out obediently to stop the intruders; but seeing the King he bowed respectfully and threw open the doors. Leonardo had barely time to cover the portrait of La Gioconda; this he always did if he expected strangers.

Francis entered; he was richly but gaudily dressed, with excess of jewelry and gold trimmings. He was twenty-four years of age, well built, tall and strong, majestic, and of agreeable manners. Yet there was something displeasing in his face, something at once sensual and sly, suggestive of a satyr.

He refused to allow Leonardo to kneel, bowed respectfully himself, and even embraced the aged painter.

"It is long since we saw each other, Maître Léonard," he said. "How is your health? Do you paint much? Have you done many new pictures? What is that one?" and he pointed to the curtained *Monna Lisa.*

"An old portrait, sire, which Your Majesty has already seen."

"Let me see it again. The oftener one sees your pictures the more one admires them."

The painter hesitated, but to his annoyance a

St. John the Baptist (Leonardo da Vinci, Genoa).

Photo by Brogi.

courtier removed the veil, and La Gioconda was revealed.

The King, throwing himself on a chair, gazed long without a word. "Marvellous!" he exclaimed at last. "That is the fairest woman I ever saw! Who is she?"

"Monna Lisa, wife of a Florentine citizen."

"Did you paint it lately?"

"Ten years ago."

"Is she still beautiful?"

"Sire, she is dead."

"Maître Léonard da Vinci," said Saint Gelais, the Court poet, "worked five years at yon portrait, and has left it unfinished—so at least he avers."

"Unfinished?" cried the King. "I pray you, what does it lack? She seems alive—on the point to speak. You are enviable, Maître Léonard! Five years with that woman! Had she not died, I trow, you would not have finished it yet." He laughed, and the resemblance to a satyr increased. It never occurred to him that Monna Lisa might have been a faithful wife.

"I see, sir, you have a pretty taste in women," resumed His Majesty gaily. "What shoulders! what a bosom! And one may guess at further beauties!"

Leonardo remained silent; he grew pale, and his eyes were fixed on the ground.

"To paint such a likeness," continued the King, "'t is not enough to be an artist; you must fathom all the secrets of a woman's heart, that labyrinth,

that tangle, impossible to the devil himself. Yon lady seems modest; she folds her hands like a nun; but wait a bit; guess what is in her heart.

"Souvent femme varie
Bien fol qui s'y fie!"

Leonardo stepped aside, as if to move another picture to the light, and Saint Gelais whispered scandal to his master concerning Leonardo's supposed tastes in matters of the heart.

Francis seemed surprised, but shrugged his shoulders indulgently, and turned to an unfinished cartoon on an easel near the portrait.

"What is this?"

"Bacchus, methinks," said the poet, pointing to the thyrsus.

"And this?"

"It would seem, Bacchus again," said Saint Gelais.

"The hair and the breast are like a girl," said the King; "it has the same smile as La Gioconda."

"A hermaphrodite then," returned the poet; and repeated Plato's fable of the original men-women, and the origin of the passion of Love. "Maître Léonard would fain restore the primitive type," he concluded mockingly.

Francis turned to the painter.

"Resolve our doubts, Master," he said; "is it Bacchus or a hermaphrodite?"

"Sire," said Leonardo, reddening, "it is St. John the Baptist."

The King shook his head in bewilderment. This mixture of the sacred and the profane seemed blasphemous to him, yet rather attractive. Not that the blasphemy mattered; every one knows that painters have queer fancies!

"I will buy both pictures," he said; "the Bacchus—I mean the Baptist, and Lisa la Gioconda. What is the price?"

"Your Majesty," began the painter, embarrassed, "they are not yet finished."

"Tut, man! St. John you can finish at once, and as for Lisa, I will not have her touched. I want her with me at once, hear you? Tell me the price, and fear not. I will not try to cheapen her."

What was Leonardo to say to this frivolous, coarse man? How explain what the portrait was to its painter, and why no price could induce him to give it up?

"You will not speak? Then I will name a price myself. Three thousand crowns? How say you? 'T is not enough? Three and a half?"

"Sire," implored the artist, his voice shaking; "I can assure you——"

"Well! well! Maître Léonard, four thousand?"

A murmur of astonishment came from the courtiers. Not Lorenzo de' Medici himself had ever set such a price upon a picture. Leonardo raised his eyes in unutterable confusion. He was ready to fall on his knees, to beg as men beg for their lives, that he might not be robbed of La Gioconda. Francis took his embarrassment for gratitude, rose

to leave, and as a farewell, again embraced the painter.

"Then that 's settled. Four thousand crowns, and the money is ready for you when you choose. To-morrow I shall send for her. Make yourself easy. I will hang her with such honour as shall content you. I know her value! I will preserve her for posterity!"

When the King had gone, Leonardo sank into a chair, looking at his picture, scarce believing what had happened. Absurd, childish devices suggested themselves to him: he would hide the portrait; he would refuse to give it up, though threatened with capital punishment. He would send Melzi to Italy with it—nay, he would flee himself.

Night fell. Francesco looked several times into the room, but did not venture to speak. Leonardo still sat before Monna Lisa, his face pale and rigid as that of a corpse. At midnight he went into Francesco's room.

"Get up. We must go to the castle. I have to see the King."

"Master, it is late. You are weary. You have not the strength. Let us wait for the morrow."

"No, it must be now. Light me the lantern, and come with me. If you will not, I will go alone."

Francesco rose and dressed himself, and they went together to the castle.

V

The walk took a quarter of an hour; the path

was steep and badly paved. Leonardo moved slowly, leaning on the young man's arm. It was a warm and starless night, black as the pit. The boughs of the trees swayed painfully under the gusts of wind. There were lights in the castle windows, and music made itself heard. The King was supping late with a small company, and amusing himself by making the young ladies of the Court drink from a silver cup chased with obscene figures. Among these ladies was his sister Marguerite, called "The Pearl of Pearls," and celebrated for her beauty and erudition. "The art of pleasing was more important to her than daily bread," so said her admirers. At heart, however, she was indifferent to all except her brother, to whom she was devotedly attached. His weaknesses seemed to her charms, his vices strength, his faun's mask the countenance of Apollo. For him she declared herself ready not merely to scatter the ashes of her body to the wind, but to sell her immortal soul. Francis abused her affection, for he made use of her not only in difficulties and dangers, but also in his amorous adventures.

Leonardo's coming was announced; and Francis, having sent for him to the supper-room, advanced with his sister to greet him. The cavaliers and Court-ladies watched the artist's entry with glances half respectful, half contemptuous. The tall old man, with the long hair, the melancholy face, the nervous manner, seemed to have dropped from an alien sphere, and sent a chill through the

company as if he had come out of a snowstorm.

"Ah! Maître Léonard!" cried the King with his customary cordiality, "you are a rare guest. What shall we offer you? You eat no flesh, I know; but you will partake of sweetmeats and fruit?"

"I thank Your Majesty. Sire, you will excuse me; I am fain to speak a few words with Your Majesty."

Francis led him aside, and asked if Marguerite might be present.

"I venture to hope that Her Highness will intercede for me," said Leonardo with a bow. Then he spread out his hands to the sovereign. "I come, sire, about my picture, which Your Majesty has desired to buy—the portrait of Monna Lisa."

"Had we not agreed upon the price?" asked the King.

"I come not about the money," said Leonardo.

"Then what is the matter?"

The painter felt again that to speak of La Gioconda to this indifferent affable young monarch was impossible. Nevertheless he forced himself to say:

"Sire, be merciful to me. Do not take this portrait from me. It shall be yours; I ask no money for it. Only leave it with me till—my death."

He paused, looking entreatingly at Marguerite.

The King shrugged his shoulders and frowned.

"Sire!" said the young lady, "grant the prayer

Marguerite de Valois (after Corneille de Lyon).

Photo by Giraudon.

of Maître Léonard. He deserves it! Be compassionate!"

"What, Madame Marguerite, are you on his side? A plot, I declare, a plot! a plot!"

Laying her hand on her brother's shoulder, she whispered: "Do you not see? He still loves her!"

"But she is dead!"

"Do men never love the dead? You said yourself she lived in her portrait! Leave him his memorial of her. Do not afflict the old man!"

Francis had a dim recollection of having somewhere heard of eternal unions of soul, of fidelity, of love that had no grossness in it. He felt inspired by magnanimity.

"You have a sweet intercessor, Maître Léonard. Be of good cheer. I will do as you ask; only remember the picture belongs to me, and you shall receive the money at once."

Something wistful and plaintive in Leonardo's eyes touched the King, and he tapped him good-naturedly.

"Fear not! I give you my word! None shall part you from your Lisa!"

Marguerite smiled and her eyes shone. She gave her hand to the painter, who kissed it fervently and in silence.

The band struck up and dancing began. No one thought any more of the uncourtly guest, who had come in like a shadow and vanished again into the starless night.

VI

As soon as the King went away the usual quiet settled upon Amboise. Leonardo worked on at his St. John, but as the picture advanced it became more difficult, and his progress was less rapid. Sometimes in the twilight he would lift the veil from the portrait of Monna Lisa, gaze long at it, and then at St. John, which stood beside it. Apparently he was comparing the two pictures. Francesco, watching breathlessly, fancied at those times that the expression of the two faces, the woman's and the youth's, mysteriously changed; they stood out from the canvas like apparitions, and under the fixed gaze of the painter lived with a supernatural life. St. John grew like Monna Lisa, and like Leonardo himself, even as a son resembles his parents.

Meantime the Master's health was declining. Melzi begged him to rest and leave his work, but this he resolutely refused to do. One day, in the autumn of 1518, he was greatly indisposed. He desisted earlier than usual from his work, and asked Francesco to help him to his bedroom. The winding stair was steep, and often of late he had been unable to ascend it without assistance. So Francesco supported him, and he went up slowly, halting frequently to recover his breath. Suddenly he staggered and fell into the young man's arms. Francesco called the old servant Battista Villanis. Together they lifted the Master and carried him to his bedroom.

He lay six weeks in bed, refusing all medical advice according to his wont. His right side was paralysed, his right arm useless. The winter found him better, but his recovery was slow. He was ambidextrous, but required both hands at once for his work. With the left he drew, with the right he painted; and he maintained that it was this division of labour which had given him superiority over other painters. He feared now that painting had become impossible to him. In the early days of December he rose from his bed, and before long came downstairs to his painting-room, but did not resume his work.

One day at the hour of siesta, Francesco, not finding him in the upper rooms, cautiously opened the studio door and looked in. Of late Leonardo had been increasingly disinclined to society; he spent many hours alone, and would allow no one to enter unbidden. Francesco, peeping now through the half-opened door, saw him standing before the picture of St. John, and trying to paint with his disabled hand. His face was distorted by the anguish of effort, the corners of his mouth drooped, the brows were contracted, and the strands of grey hair, falling over his forehead, were bathed in sweat. His fingers would not obey him, and the brush shook in the hands of the great Master as in the hand of a clumsy beginner. With bated breath Francesco watched this last struggle between the living spirit and the dying body.

VII

That year the winter was very severe. Drifting ice broke the bridges of the Loire, people were frozen on the roads, wolves came into the suburbs of the town, and prowled even under the windows of the château. One morning Francesco found a half-frozen swallow on the verandah and carried it to Leonardo, who revived it with the warmth of his breath, and established it in a cage near the fire, meaning to restore it to liberty in the spring. The Master no longer attempted to paint, and had hidden the unfinished picture with his brushes and paints in the darkest corner of the studio. The days went by in idleness. Sometimes the notary visited them and talked of the harvests, the salt tax, and the comparative merits of Languedoc and Limousin sheep. Sometimes Francesco's confessor came, Fra Guglielmo, an Italian by birth, but long settled at Amboise, a simple pleasant old man, who could tell stories about the Florence of his youth which made Leonardo laugh.

The early twilight came on, and the visitors took their departure. Then for hours at a time Leonardo would pace up and down the room, occasionally glancing at Astro. Now more than ever the cripple seemed to him a living reproach, the mockery of the one great aim of his life, the making of wings for men. Astro sat in a corner, his feet drawn up under him, winding long strips of linen on a stick, whittling sticks, carving tops, or with

his eyes blinking he would rock himself slowly and, smiling, sing his unchanging song:

"Cucurlu! Curlu!
Eagles and cranes,
Up they flew!"

At last it became quite dark, and silence descended upon the house. Out of doors the boughs of the old trees creaked and roared in the storm, and the roar was like the voice of malignant giants. The eerie howling of wolves was heard in the outskirts of the forest. Francesco piled logs on the fire, and Leonardo sat down beside it. The young man played on the lute and could sing very pleasantly. He tried to dispel the Master's melancholy by his music; once he sang him an old song composed by Lorenzo Il Magnifico for the *Masque of Bacchus and Ariadne*, a favourite with Leonardo, who had known it in his youth:

"Quant' è bella giovinezza
Ma sen fugge tuttavia?
Chi vuol esser lieto, sia;
Di doman non v' è certezza."

The Master listened, greatly moved; he remembered the summer night, the dark shadows, the brilliant moonlight in the lonely street, the sounds of the lute from the marble loggia, the same tender love-song. And he remembered, too, his thoughts of La Gioconda. Francesco, sitting at

the old man's feet, looked up and saw that tears were falling from the fading eyes.

Sometimes Leonardo would read over his old diaries, and occasionally he still wrote in them, but of the subject which now chiefly occupied his thoughts—Death.

"Thou see'st that thy hope and thy desire to return to thy native land, and to thy old life, is like the desire of the moth for the flame, and that man (who, ceaseless in desire, joyous in impatience, ever waits a new spring, and thinketh that his desire is slow in its fulfilment) does not know that he expecteth but his own destruction and his end. But this expectation is the quintessence of nature, the soul of the elements, and finding itself in the soul of man, it is the desire to return from the body unto Him who made it."

"In nature nothing exists but force and movement; and force is the volition of happiness, the eternal striving of the universe after final equilibrium and the Prime Mover."

"Every part desires to be united with its whole that it may escape imperfection."

"As the day well spent gives pleasant dreams, life well lived shall give a happy death."

"Every evil leaves bitterness in the memory, except the greatest evil, which is death, for it destroys the memory together with the life."

"When I thought I was learning to live, I was but learning how to die."

"The outward necessity of nature corresponds

with the outward necessity of reason: everything is reasonable, all is good, because all is necessary."

Thus his reason justified death, the will of the Prime Mover; yet in the depth of his heart something rebelled.

Once he dreamed that he awoke in a coffin buried alive under the earth, and with desperate resolution and panting for breath he strove to raise the lid of his prison.

Next morning he told Francesco of his desire that he should lie unburied till the first signs of decomposition should show themselves. He still loved life with a blind unreasoning love, still clung to it and dreaded death as a black pit into which that day or the next he would fall with a cry of the utmost terror. All the consolations of reason, all he had said of divine necessity and the will of the Prime Mover, vanished like smoke before this shrinking of the flesh. He would have relinquished his immortality for one ray of earthly sunshine, one waft of the spring, for the perfume of expanding leaves, for a bunch of yellow flowers from the Monte Albano, where he had been a happy child.

At night, when he could not sleep, Francesco would read to him from the Gospels. Never had they seemed to him so new, so rare in excellence, so little understood of men. Some sayings, as he thought out their meanings, deepened for him like wells.

"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

Was this indeed the answer to the question of his whole life, "Shall not men have wings?"

"And having ended all his temptation, the devil departed from him *for a season.*" What did that mean? When did the devil return to him again?

Words which might have seemed to him full of the greatest error, contrary to experience and natural law, still did not repel him.

"If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove."

He had always thought that the final knowledge and the final faith would lead by different paths to the same goal, the blending of outward and inward necessity, the will of man and the will of God. Yet was not the sting of the words in the fact that *to have faith,* even as a grain of mustard-seed, was more difficult than to see the mountain remove unto yonder place?

But there was a saying of Christ's still more enigmatical: "I thank thee, Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." How reconcile this with the injunction, "Be ye wise as serpents"?

And, again: "Consider the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin. Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? for after all these things do the Gentiles seek, and your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

Leonardo recalled his discoveries and inventions,

the machines for giving men power over nature, and asked himself:

"Is all this care for the body—what shall we eat and what shall we drink, and the like—is it mammon worship? Is there nothing in human toil, in knowledge, but the mere profit? Is knowledge like Martha, who is careful and troubled about many things, but not about the one thing needful? Is love like Mary, who has chosen the good part and sitteth at the Master's feet?"

He knew by experience the temptations inseparable from knowledge.

It seemed to the dying man that he was already face to face with the black, the dreadful pit, into which, if not to-day then to-morrow, he too must fall with a last despairing cry:

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

VIII

Sometimes of a morning, when he looked through the frosted windows at the deep snow, the grey sky, the frozen water, he thought the winter would never end. But in February there came a breath of warmth. Drops trickled noisily from the icicles at the sunny side of the houses, the sparrows twittered, and the trees were girt with dark circles where the snow had melted, the buds swelled, and patches of blue sky were seen among the clouds. Francesco placed his master's chair in a sunny window, and for hours the old man would sit quite

still with bent head, his wasted hands resting upon his knees. The swallow which had been rescued from the first frost now flew and circled about the room, perched on Leonardo's shoulder, and allowed herself to be handled and kissed on the head. Suddenly she would start up and again fly round the ceiling with impatient cries as if scenting the spring. He followed every turn of her lithe body, every movement of her pinions. The old idea of wings for men stirred within him.

One day he opened a large chest which contained his manuscript-books, stray drawings and sketches, chiefly mechanical, jottings from his two hundred "Books of Nature." All his life he had been meaning to bring order into this chaos, to sort the fragments, and unite them in one whole, one great "Book of the Universe." He knew that among them were ideas and discoveries which could materially shorten the labours of those men who were to come after him. He knew also that he had delayed too long, that it was now too late, that all his sowing would fail of fruit, that all his scientific material would perish like the *Cenacolo*, the *Colossus*, the *Battle of Anghiari*. And this, because in science as in art he had only desired with a wingless desire, had begun and not finished, had accomplished nothing. He foresaw that men would seek what he had found, would discover what he had already discovered, would walk in his paths, in his very steps; but would pass him by, would forget him as though he had never lived. In the

chest he found a small manuscript-book, yellow with age, and entitled "Birds." Of late years he had scarcely occupied himself with the flying machine, though he still often thought of it. To-day, watching the flight of his tame swallow, a new idea had come to him, a new design had perfected itself in his mind, and he determined to make a last attempt, indulging the last vain hope that by the finally successful making of wings for men the whole labour of his life would be justified.

He entered on this new task with the same resolution, with the same feverish haste which he had expended on the St. John. Ceasing to brood over death, conquering his weakness, forgetting his food and his sleep, he sat for whole days and nights over his calculations and his drawings. Francesco watching him sometimes feared this was not work but the delirium of a sick mind. With increasing alarm he noticed how the Master's face became distorted under the desperate effort of will, under the violent desire for the impossible—which men may not seek with impunity.

The week went by and Francesco never left him, not even to sleep. But a night came when deadly weariness overcame the youth; he threw himself on a chair by the fire and dozed. The morning came grey through the window, the swallow wakened and chirruped. Leonardo was still sitting at his work-table, a pen in his hand; he was greatly bent, his head almost touching the paper. Suddenly he trembled strangely, the pen dropped, and

his head fell. He made an effort to rise, tried to call Francesco, but could make no sound. Heavily and helplessly he rolled with his whole weight upon the table and overturned it. Melzi, awakened by the crash, sprang to his feet, to find the Master lying on the floor, his candle extinguished, his papers scattered, the terrified swallow flapping her wings against the rafters overhead. He realised that this was a second stroke.

For some days Leonardo lay unconscious, making occasional mutterings, always of mathematics. When he came to himself he at once asked for his sketches of the flying-machine.

"Nay, Master, Ask of me anything else, but I cannot let you work till you have mended somewhat," replied Francesco.

"Where have you put my sketches?" he demanded angrily.

"I have locked them in the attic."

"Give me the key."

"Nay, Master, what can you do with the key?"

"Give it to me this instant."

Francesco hesitated; the invalid's eyes flashed with wrath. Not to excite him, the young man gave the key. Leonardo hid it under his pillow and seemed satisfied. His recovery after this was more rapid than could have been hoped. In the beginning of April he was able again to play chess with Fra Guglielmo.

One night Francesco, sleeping on his customary bench by the Master's side, started up in alarm, for

he could not hear Leonardo's usually heavy breathing. The night-light had been extinguished; he relit it hastily, and found the invalid's bed empty; he waked Villanis and they visited all the rooms on that floor, but Leonardo was not there. Francesco was going downstairs, when he remembered the sketches hidden in the attic. He hastened thither and found the door unlocked. Leonardo, half-dressed, was seated on the floor before an old box, which he was using as a table. By the light of a tallow candle he was writing, while he muttered rapidly as if delirious. His glowing eyes, his matted hair, his brows violently contracted, his sunken helpless mouth—his whole appearance was so strange and alarming to Francesco that for a few minutes he dared not enter.

Suddenly Leonardo snatched up a pencil and drew it across a page of figures so violently that it broke. Then he looked round, saw his pupil, rose, and tottered towards him.

"I told you, Francesco," he said quickly and bitterly, "that I should soon make an end. Now I have finished. So have no fear, I shall not work any more. 'T is enough. I have grown old and dull; more dull than Astro. I know nothing at all. What I have known I forget. Is it for me to think of wings? To the devil even with the wings!"

And seizing his papers furiously he tore and trampled them.

From that day his health grew worse. He returned to his bed, and Melzi foresaw that he would

not again rise from it. Sometimes for whole he lay in a trance.

Francesco was devout, and whatever the Church taught he believed without question. Alone of Leonardo's pupils he had not fallen under the influence of those "fatal spells"; that "evil eye" attributed to the Master. Though Leonardo did not observe the Church ceremonials, his young companion divined by the instinct of love that he was not impious. The lad did not try to penetrate further into the great man's opinions. Now, however, the thought that he might die unabsolved from errors, perhaps from heresies, was torture to the pious youth. He was afraid to address the Master on the subject, but he would have given his life to save him.

One evening Leonardo, seeing his anxious face, asked him what were his thoughts. Francesco answered with some embarrassment.

"Fra Guglielmo came this morning and wanted to see you. I told him it was impossible——"

The Master looked at his young attendant and saw alarm, entreaty, hope on his face.

"Francesco, this was not what you were thinking. Why will you not tell me?"

The pupil was silent, his eyes downcast. Leonardo understood; he turned away and frowned. He had always wished to die as he had lived, in complete liberty; in the truth, so far as he knew it. But he had compassion on Francesco. Could he, in these last hours of his life, embitter a simple

Leonardo da Vinci (by himself, Turin).

Photo by Anderson.

heart, bring offences once more upon one of these "little ones"?

He looked again at his pupil; laid his wasted hand on the lad's hand and said with a quiet smile:

"My son, send to Fra Guglielmo and bid him come to-morrow. I wish to confess and to communicate. Send also for Maître Guillaume."

Francesco did not answer—he kissed Leonardo's hand in passionate gratitude.

IX

The next morning, Saturday in Passion Week, April 23d, Maître Guillaume the notary came, and Leonardo imparted to him his last wishes. He bequeathed four hundred florins to his brothers in token of reconciliation; to Francesco Melzi he left his books, scientific apparatus, machines, manuscripts, and the remainder of the salary due to him from the royal treasury; to Battista Villanis his household furniture, and the half of the vineyard outside the walls of Milan; the other half he left to his pupil Andrea Salaino. Maturina was to have a dress of good black cloth, a cloth cap trimmed with fur, and two ducats. Melzi was named executor, and the ordering of the funeral was entrusted to him. Francesco was solicitous that all should be arranged in a manner to contradict popular slanders, and make it clear that the Master had died a true son of the Catholic Church. Leonardo assented to all he proposed.

Presently Fra Guglielmo came with the Holy Viaticum, and Leonardo made his confession and received the Sacrament "according to the rites of the Church"; "in all humility and submission to the will of God," as the monk afterwards told Francesco; adding that whatever might be said against the Master he would be justified by the words of the Lord, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." All day he suffered from breathlessness, but he survived the night, and on the morning of Easter Sunday seemed a little easier.

Francesco opened the window. Pigeons were flying in the blue air, and the rustle of their flight mingled with the chime of the Easter bells.

The dying man no longer heard nor saw what was passing around him. He imagined great weights falling and rolling on him and crushing him. With an effort he freed himself and was flying upward on gigantic wings. Again the weights fell, again he conquered them, and so on, again and again. And each time the weight was heavier, the struggle to overcome it more desperate; till at last he gave up the attempt, crying aloud a despairing cry.

He resigned himself to defeat. And then immediately he realised that the weights and the wings, the falling and the flight, were all one: "above" and "below" were the same, and he was borne along on the waves of eternal motion gently as in a mother's arms.

For some days longer his body lived, but he

never recovered consciousness. On the morning of May 2d Francesco and Fra Guglielmo noticed that his breathing had grown feebler. The monk read the prayers for the dying; a little later, and the young man closed his eyes.

The face of the dead man changed but little; it wore the expression, so frequent in his lifetime, of profound and quiet attention.

The windows were widely opened, and Francesco and the two old servants were performing the last offices for the corpse. Suddenly the tame swallow, which of late had been forgotten, flew into the room, circled over the dead man, and settled at last upon his folded hands.

He was buried at the monastery of St. Florentine, but the exact site of his grave is unknown.

Writing to Florence, to the Master's brothers, Francesco thus expressed himself:

"I cannot tell the grief occasioned to me by the death of him who was more to me than a father. Long as I live I shall mourn him. He loved me with a great and tender love. The whole world will grieve for the loss of a man whose like Nature herself will not create again.

"May the Almighty God grant him everlasting peace!"

EPILOGUE

NOW it so happened that just at the time when Leonardo da Vinci died, a certain young Russian courtier named Eutychius came a second time to Amboise in the train of Karachiarov, the Russian ambassador. On his journey this young courtier, who brought a gift of gold and of priceless Persian falcons for King Francis, visited Florence, and had seen the bas-relief on the Campanile, which represented Dædalus experimenting with waxen wings. It had given Leonardo in his boyhood the first idea of Wings for Man; and now it was of interest to the young Russian, who in his spare time, for pleasure, was painting an ecclesiastical icon of *The Winged Precursor.* With vague and half-prophetic awe he contemplated the contrast between the material wings constructed by Dædalus, who was perhaps assisted by demons, and the spiritual wings —"upon which pure souls rise to God"—of the "Incarnate Angel," the Precursor, St. John the Baptist.

While at Amboise, Eutychius one day obtained leave to visit the château of Cloux, where the deceased Master, Leonardo da Vinci, had lived. The

party was received by Francesco Melzi, who showed them the studio and all it contained. They inspected the strange instruments, the apparatus for the study of the laws of sound, the great crystal eye for experiments on sight, the diving-bell, the anatomical drawings, the designs for engines of war. All this was interesting; but for Eutychius the supreme attraction was the broken frame of a wing resembling the pinion of a great swallow. He learned from Melzi of its history and its purpose; and strange thoughts rose in his breast as he remembered Dædalus on the marble tower of Santa Maria del Fiore.

Presently he stood in bewilderment before the dead Leonardo's picture of St. John the Baptist. The appearance of the Forerunner was almost that of a woman; yet he carried the reed cross, and was clothed with camel's hair. He was not like the Winged Precursor familiar to the painter of icons; but his charm was irresistible. What was the significance of the subtle smile with which he pointed to the cross of Golgotha?

Eutychius stood spell-bound, scarce listening to the animadversions of his fellows. "What? this beardless, naked, effeminate youth, the Precursor? Not of Christ, then, but of Antichrist—accursed for ever!"

Eutychius heard without heeding; and when he came away the mysterious figure of the wingless one, fair as a woman, with flowing locks like Dionysus, pointing to the cross—haunted him like a vision.

The young Russian painter was lodged in an attic beside the dove-cot; and had arranged his working place in the recess of the dormer-window.

He busied himself with the painting of the icon, already nearly completed, of St. John the Baptist. The saint stood on a sun-burnt hill, round, like the edge of a globe. It was bordered by the purple sea, and canopied by the blue vault of heaven. The figure carried in its hand a head, which was the duplicate of his own, but seemed that of a corpse. Thus Eutychius had tried to show that the man who has slain in himself all that is human may attain to a more than human flight. His face was terrible and strange; his gaze like the gaze of an eagle, fixed upon the sun. His hair and beard floated on the blast, his raiment was like the plumage of a bird. His limbs were long and gave an impression of singular lightness. On his shoulder were set great swan-like wings, extended over the tawny earth and the purple sea.

To-night Eutychius had little more to do than to touch the inner side of the plumes with gold. But his attention wandered, he thought of Dædalus and of Leonardo; he remembered the face of the wingless youth in the Master's last picture, and found it eclipsing that of the winged one which he had drawn himself. His hand grew heavy and uncertain; the brush fell; his strength failed. He left his room and wandered for hours along the banks of the silent river.

The sun had set; the pale green sky, the evening

stars, were reflected in the water, but in the east clouds were rising, and summer lightning quivered in the air as if waving fiery wings.

Returning, he lit the lamp before the icon of the Virgin, and threw himself on his bed. He could not sleep, but lay tossing and shivering feverishly for hour after hour, fancying weird rustlings and whispers in the stillness, and remembering all the eerie tales of the Russian folk-lore.

Wearied and wakeful, Eutychius tried to read. He selected an old book at random, and the familiar Russian legend of the "Crown of the Kingdom of Babylon," and of the world-wide sovereignty destined by God for the land of Russia. Then Eutychius turned a page and read another legend, that of "The White Hood."

In the days of yore Constantine the Emperor, having accepted the Christian faith and received absolution for his sins from Sylvester the Pope, desired to give the pontiff a kingly crown. But an angel, appearing unto him, bade him give a crown not of earthly but of spiritual supremacy—a White Hood like unto a monkish cowl. Nevertheless the Roman Church had laid claim to temporal no less than to spiritual power; wherefore the angel appeared to the Pope and commanded him to send the Hood to Philotheus, the Patriarch of Constantinople; and when he would have retained it, there appeared unto the Patriarch another vision: Constantine the Emperor and Sylvester the Pope, bidding him send on the Hood yet farther,

into the country of Russia, to Novgorod the Great.

"For," said Sylvester in this dream, "the first Rome has fallen by her pride and self-will; and Constantinople, the second Rome, is like to perish by the fury of the infidel; but in the third Rome, which shall be in the land of Russia, the light of the Holy Ghost is already shining, and at the last all Christian nations shall be united in the Russian dominion under the shadow of the Orthodox faith."

Each time Eutychius read these tales, a vague and boundless hope filled his soul. His heart beat and his breath caught, as though he were standing on the edge of a precipice. For it seemed that the legend of the Babylonian kingdom was prophetic of earthly greatness; that of the White Hood, of heavenly glory for his native land. However poor, however wretched she might be now in comparison with other countries, still she was to be the third Rome, the new Zion; and the rays of the rising sun were destined to shine on the seventeen golden domes of the Russian Church of St. Sophia, the Wisdom of God. And yet, he asked himself, how should it be that the White Hood, the third, the holiest Rome, should unite itself with the hateful crown of Nebuchadnezzar, who had been cursed of God, whose city was Babylon, and accursed in the Book of Revelation. The young painter's effort to solve the riddle brought fantastic vision to his hot brain.

He fell asleep, and he too dreamed a dream:

He saw a woman in shining garments, with flaming countenance and fiery wings, standing among fleeting clouds, her feet on the crescent moon; over her was a seven-pillared tabernacle, with the inscription:

"Wisdom hath builded her an house."

Prophets and patriarchs surrounded her, saints and angels, thrones and dominions and powers, and all the company of Heaven. And among the prophets at Wisdom's very foot stood John the Precursor with his white plumes as on the icon, *but wearing the face of Leonardo da Vinci*, who had dreamed of wings for men. And behind the Woman, golden cupolas and pinnacles of churches innumerable glowed like fire in the azure sky; and beyond them stretched a gloriously boundless expanse, which Eutychius recognised as the land of Russia.

Belfries shook with a triumphant peal; angels sang victorious Alleluia; the seven archangels smote their wings, and the seven thunders spoke. And above the fire-clothed Woman, Hagia Sophia, the Wisdom of God, the heavens opened, and bright as the sun—terrible—shone the White Hood, the heavenly head-dress, over the land of Russia.

*

Eutychius awoke. He opened the windows, and to him was wafted the fragrance of leaves and grasses washed by rain. The sun had not yet risen, but gold and purple decked the place of his

coming—the skyey verge above the woods, and the river, and the fields. The town still slept in twilight; only the belfry of St. Hubert glistened with a pale green light. The hush was full of great expectation. Far away on the sand-banks of the Loire the white swans were calling.

Suddenly, like a live coal, the sun shone out behind the forest. Something like music passed across the earth and the heaven. Pigeons shook their wings and rose in circles. Day, entering the window, fell full on the icon of the Forerunner; the wings, extended over lands and seas, flashed and sparkled in the morning radiance, as if informed with supernatural life.

Eutychius, dipping his brush into crimson, wrote these words on the scroll upon the icon, under the Winged Precursor:

"Behold I will send my messenger before my face, and he shall prepare my way before me."

THE END

"THOU ART THYSELF THY GOD, THYSELF THY NEIGHBOUR:
O BE AS WELL THINE OWN CREATOR TOO;
BE THE ABYSS ABOVE, THE DEPTH BELOW;
AT ONCE THINE OWN END, AND THINE OWN BEGINNING."

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